

responsible for the governmental relations of General Headquarters Navy Headquarters and Air Headquarters which included the main function of examining and sanctioning all proposals emanating from General Headquarters and Air Headquarters and the Defence Coordination Department under a representative Indian who would take over matters relating to denial policy evacuation economic warfare demobilisation amenities public relations canteens etc

This revelation that the Indian Defence Minister was to have subjects of minor importance to deal with was not quite to the liking of the Congress leaders. They informed Sir Stafford of their inability to accept it. A new formula was supplied to them without any list of subjects. They returned it taking that they should be provided with full details and that their ultimate decision would depend upon the allocation of subjects. Then they received a revised formula showing the functions of the War Department. It was so widely and comprehensively framed that they could make neither head nor tail of it—which belonged to the War Department and which to the Defence Department. They asked for illustrative lists of subjects. Sir Stafford Cripps referred them to the old list for the Defence Department and told them that there was practically no difference between the old and the new. Why did they not stick on to the old? They were so much fed up with the whole procedure that the point was taken up with Sir Stafford who in the course of a communication stated that nothing further could have been done by way of giving responsibility for Defence services to representative Indian members without jeopardising the immediate defence of India under the Commander in Chief. As though they did not want to clash with the man and his mission they immediately sent words to him. No one has suggested any restrictions on the normal powers of the Commander in Chief. Indeed we can beyond this and were prepared to agree to further powers being given to him as War Minister. So the defence problem was solved.

Then came for discussion the question of the proposed National Government. I have already told you that Cripps had declared during private conversations as well as in public statements that there was going to be an all-powerful Cabinet in which the Viceroys would be excluded as unconstitutional

head. As the negotiations progressed it transpired that the term 'Cabinet' was a bait purposely thrown to create an atmosphere. What he now presented was a new picture—I mean the old one—of the Viceroy looming large in the background like a giant. Parading before him like pygmies were the members of his proposed Cabinet. They had round their necks loosely tied invisible wires the ends of which the Viceroy held in his hand for checking and directing their movements.

The Indian leaders could not perceive any difference between this portrait and the one they were already familiar with. They turned to the artist for enlightenment. Sir Stafford explained that though the Viceroy appeared to be big there was nothing to be afraid of. He was a being full of flesh with no blood. And, moreover, he was seated at a safe distance from where he could not dream of interfering with any one. One of the cleverest in the group asked—“What are these thin lines running to him?” “Oh! These lines are wires—life-saving wires. These men are playing in deep waters. You know they are not accustomed to swimming. If anything is going to happen—say, drowning or something—the Big man will pull them up and save them from the consequences,” replied the artist. The leaders naturally put on a puzzled look and showed by their demeanour that they wanted further elucidation. Then by way of simplifying the problem he said a bit impatiently “Look here. It is like this. Supposing x stands for the old cabinet and y for the new cabinet. What is the difference between the old and the new cabinets when x is equal to y ? Well, that is the difference.” He did not tarry any longer. He quitted the conference chamber—not India, at least not then.

The Congress informed Sir Stafford that the picture of the government, which was so like the old in all essential features, was such that they could not fit into it. However, in the perilous circumstances then prevailed they were prepared to assume responsibility provided a truly national government was formed. They stressed the point that the National Government must be a cabinet government with full power and must not merely be a continuation of the Viceroy's Executive Council. In answer to this Sir Stafford stated that a Cabinet Government with full power could not be possible.

THE STORY
OF
THE WAVELL PLAN

BY
K P C MENON

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CHAPTER I

POLITICAL DEADLOCK ,

The thread of Indian politics was suddenly broken when in the second week of August 1942 the Government of India ordered the arrest of the members of the Congress Working Committee. Whether the order was given at a weak or a strong moment cannot be adjudged because there is no definite evidence pointing to the one or the other but it may be termed a 'most unfortunate' moment in fairness to the parties involved and a 'desperate' moment as far as Great Britain is concerned. It turned out to be one of the turning points in the life of the Indian National Congress—the vital nerve of the nation—which had fought unarmed against the mighty British arms to the surprise and admiration of the modern civilization for securing the independence of India.

night—I mean the night preceding the arrest—that would be free the very next morning. Because this in every way welcome to her was given by her de-revered leaders she could not disbelieve it. She had a heart for them and on them rested her future hopes moreover as the time lapsed she had learnt to place her confidence in them. It was therefore with the visitor **Free India** that she retired for the night and when up— She quivered only for a moment. Then she knew she was free and that goaded her to action. Dust-lamp posts were the first to fall under her wrath. In the round she concentrated on buses trams and trains with success. Her next attempts were on police and railway stations which hopelessly collapsed under the unabated fury of fire. These were but a few of the targets on whom she let hell on that memorable occasion and that too in the immediate presence of a watchful government. She never cared whether she was watched or not so long as she could do what she wanted. That was how she looked at it.

However her newly acquired freedom was short. Her continued activities brought her into conflict with authorities. By some special method of calculation the Government of India saw that the time had come for an act. They started a policy of intense repression which long resulted in open warfare between the contending parties. Incident followed incident in an atmosphere of daily reprisals mass arrests and collective fines. Many lost their lives in the upheaval and many more had to suffer imprisonment for indefinitely long periods. In spite of the suppression of the movement it took several months for authorities to check its growth. The happenings have to be known as the August disturbances and the period during which they occurred is described by men of all shades of opinion as the darkest in the history of Britain's relations with India. The tragic incidents left the country dull and emaciated from which it has not yet recovered.

Why did the Government put the leaders in prison? It is said to be on the strength of a resolution passed by the All India Congress Committee in which there were two motions—
Quit India. The expression was introduced in con-

with the Indian independence and it must in all probability have been used figuratively meaning that the British rule must go or cease to exist and a provisional government of free India representing the major groups and parties in the country must be set up immediately. The Government of India and the British Government gave it a different interpretation. They were not in a mood to see any figure of speech in the expression and proceeded to unfold it through the simple and the most direct method. To them it meant that they—both the official and non-official sections of the British people—should walk out of India leaving the country in utter chaos and disorder and an easy prey to the Japanese vultures. They argued that no responsible government could take such a step—least of all in the midst of war. They did take a step, however, which appealed to them most perhaps, and it was that which culminated in the indefinite incarceration of Indian politicians.

The Britishers thought that the situation was simplified by this clever move on their part. But it was not so. Complications cropped up without having the means to set them right. Mentally and physically injured India remained apathetic to her environments. She seemed to care very little for the outcome of the war. Whether it continued or ended was the same to her. One thing which affected her was the thought that her sons were rotting in British jails. Great Britain, on the other hand, knew that India was an essential part of the world front against the Axis powers and yet had to treat her with suspicion. It was bad to have mutual suspicions among the Allies in the midst of an armed conflict, they were aware of that. However, there was no help for it as the door of understanding was closed. Thus in the place of hearty co-operation and friendship between the two nations which would have been of immense value in the safe and speedy prosecution of the war there prevailed mutual distrust and suspicion which created an acute situation in the two countries adversely affecting the war effort by a long inch. It could have been averted but at the nick of the moment two links—the British statesmanship and the Indian leadership—in the chain of Indo-British relationship were found twisted.

Let us pass on to consider the circumstances which induced the Congress, rightly or wrongly, to take such a

momentous decision against the British who were then at extreme danger point of imminent extinction. There were always circumstances favourable to the Indo-British misunderstanding but never for their mutual understanding & appreciation. Some were natural and others were inspired put up. Among them was one on which they took particular delight to show the world how widely they differed and what endless time they would go on doing it. They differed at least they gave out the impression that they differed between life and death. This one subject known as India's insistent demand for freedom from British domination continued to vitiate the atmosphere between India and England for over a generation. To the British this topic seemed to be an eyesore but to the Indians in general and to the Congressmen in particular this was and is a favourite subject and great passion in their life. Crisis after crisis came and yet no agreement could be reached.

It is not to be supposed that the British people were opposed to the idea of granting political freedom to India. What they wanted was time to think over and to give it a bit at their own sweet convenience. India was not prepared to accept it in that way. She demanded for lock stock barrel at one time and on the spot. Well this difference could not be worked out.

CHAPTER II

CRIPPS OFFER

There were many scandalizing political offers from the British in the past but they were all rejected. It was with one such offer that Sir Stafford Cripps came to India in March 1942. He was a friend of India and had for years championed her claim for self government. Several of the prominent Indian leaders were his personal friends. During an earlier visit he was given a cordial reception which no other British could have had. This time too he was cordially received.

was perhaps for these reasons that he was selected. That his personality and influence would count if not his proposals must have been the hope of the British Cabinet. That hope was found shattered during the rehearsal. Hardly was there any one to look at his person though everybody was looking at his proposals. Let us also take a look at it.

The following is the text, in part, of the British Declaration sent through Sir Stafford Cripps.

"His Majesty's Government having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of promises made in regard to the future of India have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any respect of its domestic and external affairs.

"His Majesty's Government therefore make the following declaration.

"(a) Immediately upon cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India in manner described hereafter an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.

"(b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for participation of Indian States in the constitution-making body.

"(c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the constitution so framed subject only to (i) The right of any province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.

"With such non-acceding provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree

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upon a new constitution giving them the same full status as the Indian Union and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down

(ii) The signing of a treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution making body. This treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands. It will make provision in accordance with undertakings given by His Majesty's Government for the protection of racial and religious minorities but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in future its relationship to other member States of the British Commonwealth.

Whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the constitution it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its treaty arrangements so far as this may be required in the new situation.

(d) The constitution making body shall be composed as follows unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities.

Immediately upon the result being known of provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities the entire membership of the Lower Houses of Provincial Legislatures shall as a simple electoral college proceed to the election of the constitution making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about 1/10th of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion as to their population as in the case of representatives of British India as a whole and with the same powers as British Indian members.

(e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new constitution can be framed His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the Defence of India as part of their world war effort but the task of organising to

the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the cooperation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India."

This is the famous Cripps' offer. It was issued on March 29, 1942 and was hailed in Great Britain as the Declaration of Indian Independence. For that very reason the Indian political parties and personalities refused to accept it. They could not find an atom of independence in the proposals. Hitherto they had been yoked to the British plough but the present offer revealed that they would be yoked to other ploughs as well by British method. In letter and spirit this was no independence as there was no right to self-determination envisaged in it. It was for the people to mutually agree as to what they should do and how to do it with regard to the internal management of their affairs. Again, there was no better authority than the will of the people to decide the kind and the degree of relationship they should maintain with other nations. It seemed that the British Government had failed to grasp the idea that in freedom there was no dictation but negotiation and that too on equal terms.

If the plea of disagreement between communities were to be put forward it might be pointed out that there was no one more responsible for its birth and growth than the British. It was they who had sown the seeds of political dissension and communal discord on the Indian soil and nurtured through in order to reap a rich harvest. They were not disappointed either. They had harvested sufficient for centuries to come and yet they would not leave the field nor would they allow others to have the land. All this is a clear indication that

had the broadmindedness to do it because it was not in his interests

It is said in the Draft Declaration that immediately upon cessation of hostilities the British Government would take steps to set up in India an elected body for getting a new constitution framed. If the exigency of war prevented them from adopting measures towards Indian freedom in the immediate present there was no need for a declaration at the moment. They could have as well postponed it till the end of the war. Why they put forward a new proposal when they were facing a critical period clearly showed that they were hard pressed by circumstances. Work of any kind that is made to do through pressure must be completed on the spot. If left over it will never be finished because in pressure there is no purposefulness. Had it been the intention of the Britishers to part with power they could have made arrangements for it unhindered. No one would have stopped them and the war on which they laid the blame would have expedited the work. However they had no such intention. If they had there was ample time to do it not during the war but between the two wars—more than two decades.

The Declaration is intended to fulfil the promises made in regard to the future of India it is stated. Curiously enough in all the promises it was the future that had gained prominence and it never materialised to the present. Many promises were made no doubt but they were all broken too. The one that is before us is not more than a promise because it does not affect the miserable present. Where is the guarantee that it would have been kept? From what had been learnt in the past it could be safely deduced that when the moment for its fulfilment arrived they could as well make another declaration with a big *pucca* promise for another remote future. And it would have gone on like this indefinitely without ever reaching the goal.

One thing the British Draft proposed which could be given effect to immediately was for the effective participation of the leaders in the counsels of their country. This was not an unconditional offer. There was a great emphasis when it said that His Majesty's Government must inevitably

bear the responsibility for the Defence of India." Even then it would mean that the whole Government machinery except the Defence Department was to be transferred to Indian hands with full powers of alterations and additions in the constitution. On being asked if that was so, Sir Stafford Cripps categorically replied that "it is impossible to make any change in the existing constitution." When further questioned—not all at once but in the course of three weeks' talks—he said that it was going to be a National Government with a 'Cabinet' consisting of 'Indian ministers'. On final clarification it was revealed that the National Government which was proposed to be put up would be the Viceroy and his Executive Council all over again with the old powers of the former intact. There it ended.

During the period of hostilities defence is of essential importance which should be organised and controlled by a national government in order to create and intensify the power of mass resistance. Both soldiers and civilians in different fields of their activities must feel that they are fighting for their freedom under national leadership. However, the U.K. Government could not forget the adage British Officers and Indian Sepoys. Hence they decided upon keeping the Defence Department in memory of all that was past. And they knew that once it changed hands it was lost to them for ever.

Throughout the British proposals there is a tendency to disintegrate and disunite India. This tendency is all the more evident when it says that the right of any province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position would be recognised. It is India—including all the provinces and states—that is asking for freedom and it is to that India that freedom is to be granted. Why should the Britishers suggest that she would be divided, freed and served separately? Do they think that this method would enable them to retain their empire in India for all time to come? Is it then belief that India of her own accord would never be able to resolve her differences and meet on a common platform? If so, they are entirely mistaken. There is an end for everything and the ends for the Indian political differences and the British rule are not very far off. When

that comes it is not India that will lose much by the termination of British connection but Great Britain herself—in the long run of course—unless she changes her dubious ways. One would have expected of the British Government to bring about goodwill and co-operation among the people of India whom they govern but not friction and disruption. They would have gained from India more than what they had if she had been freed.

CHAPTER III

REJECTION

The course chosen by the Congress in rejecting the British proposals had been a first class blunder—as the considered opinion of many in India and abroad at the time. They also thought that the path of negation for which the Congress had a special fascination would in this instance do considerable harm to nationalist India's prospects. They were right then and we will have to agree if now they were to say that it had come true. In it there is surprisingly one difference. The truth of their statement has not been proved in the same spirit as they meant it to be understood. Many of the subsequent events that had occurred would have been far from their minds when they pronounced their opinion. *Ye* and *no* almost the smallest words with most insignificant sounds are the two wheels resting on which the world works forward and backward. Either of them is capable of doing a good as well as a bad turn. If the Congress had said *yes* there is no knowing where it would have taken them. Probably it would have proved worse to them or it is also likely that they might have got stuck up where they were. Hitler said *yes* and with what result? If he had known how it could end he would not have started his campaign. Who knows? Do not some of us jump into the fire knowing that we will get burnt? And yet there are occasions when fire does not perform its function.

or at least we are not conscious whether it does or not. The end we know only when we reach it, and after having reached the end it is pointless to wish and lament that we did not touch the other end. But that is what we generally do.

One reason for the rejection of the British offer was that it related mainly to an uncertain future—after the last shot of the war was fired. Much depended upon the unanswerable questions who would win the war and where it would end. Even supposing our prayer had been granted and the Allies scored there were again certain provisions in the proposals which would imperil the development of a free and united nation. The very constitution making body was composed of non-representative elements. The Indian States were to be represented on population basis but the State people themselves had no hand in choosing their representatives. Again there was the option—uncalled for—given to the provinces to join or not to join the proposed Indian Union. Last of all, the unwillingness on the part of the British to give up the vital parts of the Defence Department. Taken together it would amount to this that the dream of real freedom was nothing but an illusion.

An extract from the resolution of the Congress Working Committee containing their views on the two subjects—ceding Provinces and Defence of India—is given below which would reveal the chief reasons for the rejection of the British proposals.

"The acceptance beforehand of the novel principle of non-accession for a province is also a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the provinces and which may well lead to further difficulties in the way of the Indian States merging themselves in the Indian Union. The Congress has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity and any break in that unity, especially in the modern world when people's minds inevitably think in terms of ever larger federations, would be injurious to all concerned and exceedingly painful to contemplate. Nevertheless the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union, or to

their declared and established will. While recognising this principle the Committee feel that every effort should be made to create conditions which would help the different units in developing a common and cooperative national life. The acceptance of the principle inevitably involves that no changes should be made which result in fresh problems being created and compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area. Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the Union consistently with a strong national state. The proposal now made on the part of the British War Cabinet encourages and will lead to attempts at the very inception of a union and thus create friction just when the utmost cooperation and goodwill are most needed. This proposal has been presumably made to meet a communal demand but it will have other consequences also and lead politically reactionary and obscurantist groups among different communities to create trouble and divert public attention from the vital issues before the country.

Any proposal concerning the future of India must demand attention and scrutiny but in to-day's grave crisis it is the present that counts and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present. The Committee have necessarily attached the greatest importance to this aspect of the question and on this ultimately depends what advice they should give to those who look to them for guidance. For this present the British War Cabinet's proposals are vague and altogether incomplete and it would appear that no vital changes in the present structure are contemplated. It has been made clear that the Defence of India will in any event remain under British control. At any time defence is a vital subject. During wartime it is all the more important and covers almost every sphere of life and administration. To take away defence from the sphere of responsibility at this stage is to reduce that responsibility to a farce and nullity and to make it perfectly clear that India is not going to be free in any way and her Government is not going to function as a free and independent government during the pendency of the war. The committee would repeat that another

and fundamental prerequisite for the assumption of responsibility by the Indian people in the present, is their realisation as a fact that they are free and are in charge of maintaining and defending their freedom. What is most wanted is the enthusiastic response of the people which cannot be evoked without the fullest trust in them and the devolution of responsibility on them in the matter of defence. It is only thus that even at this grave eleventh hour it may be possible to galvanise the people of India to rise to the height of the occasion. It is manifest that the present Government of India, as well as its provincial agencies, are lacking in competence, and are incapable of shouldering the burden of India's defence. It is only the people of India, through their popular representatives, who may shoulder this burden worthily. But that can only be done by present freedom, and full responsibility being cast upon them.

"The Committee, therefore, are unable to accept the proposals put forward on behalf of the British War Cabinet."

Though the Working Committee had rejected the proposals after full and earnest consideration they were not without hopes of coming to a settlement. They were rather anxious that some arrangement should be arrived at not because that there was anything attractive in the offer but because they realised that the overriding problem before them was the defence of the country from aggression and invasion which could not be effectively put through unless there was a National Government with full power of control and direction. It was on this assumption that the Congress-Cripps negotiations proceeded and continued for more than two weeks. During the first talks they had with Sir Stafford Cripps they were given to understand that there would be a National Government which would function as a Cabinet and that the position of the Viceroy would be analogous to that of the King in England *vis-à-vis* his Cabinet. The practical course with regard to India Office, Sir Stafford declared, was to have it attached or incorporated with the Dominions' Office. Regarding Indian Defence portfolio he explained that it was to be divided into two—the War Department and the Indian Government. The Indian Government was to be

unless constitutional changes on a very large scale and of a most complicated character had been effected. This risk His Majesty's Government would not take in the middle of the European war. Were such a system to be introduced by convention he said the nominated cabinet would be responsible to no one but itself and would in fact constitute an absolute dictatorship of the majority. Since it would subject them to a permanent majority in the cabinet the minorities in India would not agree to this.

Maulana Azad in the course of a letter which was to be the last to Sir Stafford dealt with this objection. He said

You refer to the absolute dictatorship of the majority. It is astonishing that such a statement should be made in this connection and at this stage. This difficulty is inherent in any scheme of a mixed cabinet formed to meet an emergency but there are many ways in which it can be provided for. Had you raised this question we would have discussed and found a satisfactory solution. The whole approach to this question has been that a mixed cabinet should be formed and should co-operate together. We accepted this. We are not interested in the Congress as such gaining power but we are interested in the Indian people as a whole having freedom and power. How the cabinet should be formed and should function was a question which might have been considered after the main question was decided that is the extent of power which the British Government would give up to the Indian people. Because of this we never discussed it with you or even referred to it. Nevertheless you have raised this matter for the first time in what is presumably your last letter to us and tried most unjustifiably to side-track the real issue between us.

It appeared that there was no reply to this from Sir Stafford but before leaving India he in a letter of 13th October expressed his deep regret for the failure of his mission much due to the unbreakable rock of racial and communal differences. On return to England he reiterated the same old tale of communism in his frontier to the American audience and added that the Congress demand if met would mean Hindu domination to which the Muslim and the Depressed Classes could no have agreed. Then he revealed [with tears in his eyes] that Mr. Gandhi had asked the British to walk out of

India leaving the country in a state of anarchy and had threatened the extremes of pressure to win political freedom for his party Referring to the amount of support Mahatma Gandhi might get in launching a pressure movement and the British reaction to it he said "He may gain a measure of support for mass disobedience but for the sake of India as well as for the cause of the United Nations it will be our duty to insist on keeping India as a safe and orderly base for our joint operations against the Japanese Whatever steps are necessary to that end we must take fearlessly" This speech was delivered on 27th July 1942 and on 8th August 1942 the Congress passed the 'Quit India' resolution Is there anything surprising in it?

This is how the chapter dealing with the Cripps proposals in the history of India terminated The people of India would not have been drawn into it but for the presence of Sir Stafford Cripps on whom they relied as one would rely on a sincere friend That he would behave as he did they could not have expected from what he had striven to do for India in the past He used to feel for the cause of India which he deemed good and just and had fought for it on every available occasion To many of the principal leaders of this country he had extended his friendship—not merely political but personal—which they had highly valued He was not a novice in politics whose sense of justice could be doubted but an eminently placed, experienced statesman and politician for whom India had unstinted admiration Despite these happy relations that he would have betrayed India when he had the power or at least the privilege to help her towards freedom was beyond comprehension From this episode India, however, learnt one bitter lesson adding to her large stock of bitter experiences with the British Every British friend is a British fist and a friend last and the curtain may never be drawn for the showing of the last item

CHAPTER IV

BRITISH PLIGHT

Did the Congress commit a great blunder by refusing to accept the British offer? We could have said they did. They ought not to have taken pains to find out the points of difference between what they were given and what they had asked for. If they could have got the complete thing they had demanded, they would have had it long ago. The fact that they did not get it showed that the British were not willing to part with it. There were two ways open. To put up a continuous fight until a complete victory was achieved or to fight sporadically and seize the opportunities as they came up. The first alternative ceased to exist when in 1937 the Congress accepted office. The second was open to them when the Cripps proposals appeared on the British mailing list. Why did they not take it? They argued that the conditions proposed were such that there was the possibility of disagreeing with the Viceroy and threatening to resign. If they feared to enter on the plan of having to come out some time later they ought to have known that they would have to remain out for ever. In sleep we might die but that does not keep us awake.

There is no doubt that defence is an important factor during war. It is no less certain that a country must be defended by its own people whose love of liberty is the greater and therefore their power to resist an invasion or to launch a counter attack must be the stronger. This is true where a people are already free and are well prepared to meet violence with violence. The same honest logic cannot be applied to India as she is at present or was at the time of Cripps visit. She had been completely disarmed as long ago as a century and a half. Her life since then had been one of utter slavery and of meek submission to foreign exploitation. Through rigorous measure of oppression and generations of encrusted idleness her martial spirit had been destroyed by the ruling classes for the simple reason that they thought it to be the surest way of keeping her under perpetual subjection. The remnant if there was anything left has been systematically filtered out of her by the ultramodern creed of nonviolence. Is it possible

for India in these circumstances to wage an effective war independently against any aggressive nation with the resources at her disposal?

I am not to be taken as suggesting that there is no military organisation in India. We know there is one, partly Indian and partly British, but wholly officered and controlled by the British. Before the war its chief function was to enforce peace among a rebelling, freedom-loving population. Purposely its number, that of the Indian section, was kept within certain limits—enough to help the British in putting down internal strife but not enough to turn against them and fight a few successful battles. However, the opening of the European war found India moving towards militarism a second time since the demobilisation after the last war. The slow process of recruitment started under the auspices of the British Government soon gained speed resulting in a rapid expansion of the Indian armed forces. Many in thousands on a daily average drawn from civilian life were enlisted. From a peacetime strength of about 500 Indian commissioned officers it went upto 10,000. It is easy to gather from this the proportion of increase in the military personnel during the war. Indian industry which had been on the point of death for want of care and nourishment was immediately revived to active life and made to break all speed records in the manufacture of war materials. Was this phenomenal expansion of the armed services effected for the exclusive purpose of protecting India against aggression? Emphatically not. It was hurriedly carried out to make good the lack of manpower and equipments in other parts of the empire and fight Britain's battles. This is clearly evident from the fact that every recruit was invited to sign a bond with one essential condition of liability for service overseas which he was made to fulfil the first thing after a preliminary training. Were they all sent to the Far East and to the Middle East for guarding the Indian borders?

Thus it turned out that during Sir Stafford's visit some of the British and American forces, probably stationed as a symbol of the Allied help to India, were having a fine time in Indian provincial capitals and cantonments while most of the Indian troops were fighting abroad to save Britain. In the

absence of adequate transport facilities the task of recalling them from the fronts would have been very difficult to accomplish. And if by some chance it had been made possible whether they could have successfully resisted a Japanese onslaught or that of any other Axis power when there was no means of resistance was doubtful. One thing which stands out above all others in the modern warfare is that it cannot be effectively conducted except with the close co-operation of the three military arms—land, sea and air. In India as it then was there was no naval strength worth the talking nor was there any real air power. How could she have dreams of defending herself single-handed without the means at hand to carry it out? And yet the Congress thought or they said they thought they could manage it provided the British agreed to quit. There is no doubt that this confidence proceeded from the belief that if the British left India without making any hubbub Japan might see no reason to invade her. This would mean that the war aim of the Nazis—one Axis power in the west—was the conquest of the world while that of the Japanese—another Axis power in the east—was the liberation of the world. Where would the friends meet? However it was on such reasoning that the leaders of the Congress acted or proposed to act. They did not realise the complexities of the defence problem when they asked for the full control of the Defence Department. By the time they realised it and were willing to surrender their claim the prospect of the national government with full power on which they had counted as the minimum they would get in the bargain dwindled and disappeared altogether. Instead of basing our decision on the main points of a subject we debate on a single though important point and ultimately lose all the points. This is how the world works.

There is one aspect of the question which we have yet to look up. It is all right to say that the Congress did wrong or did right in rejecting or accepting the British offer. What is not right is to think that because there was an offer it should have been a genuine offer. Would the British have parted with it if those for whom it was meant were willing to take it up without creating any fuss over it? This question we have to answer. Tracing the position of the European war to the early summer of 1942 we find that Great

Britain was facing the darkest situation. Though the Islanders were fighting with all they were worth they had very little hope of emerging from that crisis. Threatened by invasion and burned and blasted by the nightly visitations of fires and high explosives they were in a very bad predicament. They envisaged a condition in which their lot would be crushing defeat and bitter fruits of slavery. They were in utter despair not knowing what to do, but then there was the inspiring song which came to their aid 'Britons never shall be slaves.' It would be foolish to be enslaved when there was an empire of slaves to fight and rescue their shores, they thought. If the worst came to the worst they could make India their base from which they could operate against the Axis hordes. They were happy that there were men in millions available in India for the fighting job under the British banner and in proportion there was as much material which would come handy to the needs of the campaigning. Between them and the practicability of their new idea there was a fencing—political leaders. They must be kept on a pacifying level for the duration of the crisis if the thing should work according to plan. Sir Stafford was summoned and sermoned on patriotism and despatched with the draft. He was, however, forewarned that there should be no premature commitments on his part. He came, discussed and negotiated with the leaders in a friendly spirit keeping a keen ear over the London telephone to know the progress of the war and when he heard that the tide had changed he wound up his business and departed or as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru put it 'they (Whitehall diehards) pulled him up'. Had Britain been overrun by Germany India could have had something—just the minimum to make her put in the maximum war effort—but not otherwise. Neither Sir Stafford nor Great Britain was to be blamed for this because they conjointly did it for self-preservation. It is a great thing—this instinct for self-preservation—nay, greater than every other instinct. It does not recognise any law nor does it bow down before any reason. Without bothering about *pro* and *con* it straightforward goes and preserves the self by hook or crook. No individuals and no nations and not even birds and beasts are immune from it. Then how can the British be?

CHAPTER V

RETROSPECTION

Three years passed with the leaders in isolation and prison. They were three gruesome years without a parallel in the history of the world in general and in that of India in particular. In the war ravaged European countries millions were killed and wounded not only of the armed forces but among the civilian populations as well. Hundreds of thousands of buildings erected by the toil and sweat of peaceful folks in the course of centuries were destroyed. The whole cities and towns were razed to the ground as though there was no more use for them. The social and economic life of the people was completely subverted by means of propaganda and persuasive tactics employed to get them more interested in war efforts. In short almost everything old and therefore familiar was altered beyond recognition or ruined or reduced to shambles.

In the course of twenty five years the world has experienced two wars—and before that any number. It is strange that the war machine has not been destroyed and no effective measures have been taken to eliminate the war like spirit which culminates in war and envelopes the world in darkness. No war has ever solved any human problem except the problem of over population and that has never been a motive for any of the battles fought in the past. Then why turn to it for help? Speaking of the armed hostilities which have just concluded in the west it is clear that the world has not benefitted by it. What I mean to say is that the conditions prevailing in the world are not better than what they were before the war broke out. On the other hand they are worse in every respect. Hardly had the scars left by the last war been healed up when the deadly symptoms of the end of peace and tranquillity loomed in the horizon. The opposing forces clashed and the world was strangulated. It has now ended after doing the worst possible turn to humankind. How long these fresh wounds would take to heal up is difficult to predict. In the mean time—what next?

Has the war been able to secure that for which it was fought? Did it bring anything to compensate for the immense sacrifices made on its behalf? Nothing of the sort. What it did bring was bloodshed and destruction. Something more is yet to arrive—starvation and destitution. Is the world sadder and wiser for this experience? There are no signs even if it is so. No doubt the European war terminated in a profound and lasting defeat to the Nazis who fully deserved it and the Allies were given the honour of a glorious triumph which they got after risking much. Mere triumph is nothing when it is not followed by adequate steps to prevent the recurrence of the calamities the world has suffered. It has been proclaimed by the Allies at the outbreak, during and towards the end, of the war that they had been forced into it by the Axis. That much we can understand. They were waging it to total crushing victory, they announced, in order that there might be no future wars. The proof is yet to come for that, but there is every indication that before long it might be disproved. We were also told that the new world would be far freer than the old and it would have complete freedom from the fear of war. What do we see?

The roar of battle has only just been over and yet they talk almost openly of a war with Russia—the one great power who has contributed most to the fall of Germany. There is considerable deterioration in the Big Three relations inspite of all the peace conferences that have been recently held. No peace machinery constructed at San Francisco can stop a war between big nations and no such machinery is under contemplation even. They have already shown that they are unable to settle their own disputes. On most matters affecting the Big Three Great Britain and the United States find it easy to reach an accord but Russia's suspicions of the other two and *vice versa* make a real understanding between them a problem. It is not that Russia is invariably in the wrong but it is the old pre-war feeling that is showing up. She was held as a nation at bay by many other nations including Great Britain and America and everything that could be done to offend and humiliate her was done from the period of the Russian Revolution right up

to her joining in the war. Is it not natural that she would be suspicious and cautious in dealing with the other two big powers? What is the first thing for the big two to do but to create a spirit of confidence where it is lacking and to show frankness and sincerity in their dealings with her? If they fail to secure the willing cooperation of Russia in matters pertaining to international politics there is sure to be a clash one day or other. Indeed it would be very bad for the whole world.

Bernard Shaw did not celebrate the V Day. On being asked why he did not participate in it he replied in his characteristic style with much truth in it. There is no peace yet in Europe—the worst is yet to come. I do not want to join the fools who are prating away about this peace and who are celebrating, as if everything is over when in fact perhaps the grimdest time still lies ahead for all Europe. How can serious people rejoice amid devastation and destitution that are in Europe today? There are millions of starving. They include little children. There are great cities in ruins, tracts flooded and millions dead and maimed. How can we proclaim the burning of Berlin as a victory? Berlin is not the German capital alone. It is a world capital as much as New York and London are world capitals with their culture. You cannot destroy the culture of centuries and consider it victory. Those days are gone when wars ended with victory for one side. Now it results in destitution for all. You cannot stop war and there can be no permanent peace while men have fists. They will fight with fists if they cannot have cannon and flying bombs and airplane. So why talk about disarmament? Russia has emerged as the strongest European power. I can think that people have been fighting for their system at their country and the rest has been fighting for their far flung. Let us hope that the three big powers would get to be. They have tremendous power as a whole but if they fall in, then it helps us all.

India was not in the war in those as the only a free country can afford to have one's friends blighted; a plant she did not indulge in either one's happiness in seeing justice for where it was due. Nor ever from the tyranny of a heavy

premium she was not exempted Fighting men and war materials were regularly sent to different fronts to fight out somebody else's freedom battles Dealing with a dependency, we have to remember, there is no question of permission or willingness That is a point favourable to both. This procedure, it is so utterly common, does not generally affect any conscience If there is one which does not share the popular view and looks rather muddy over it the expression 'in anticipation of sanction', because it covers every aspect of human activities, would make it transparently clear In the case of India the worried look of muddiness was cleared as early as it could be practicable when the leaders singly or in batches were segregated and given accommodation in Aga Khan's palace, etc It was in the middle of the war and they were provided with strong guards Whether this extra courtesy was shown to them for their safety or for the safety of others is not known Whatever it was the detention had a wholesome effect upon those who wanted a free hand in the matter of troop movements Their dear wish was at last fulfilled Things began to move freely and in quick succession

India had nothing to do with the war but the war itself had a lot to do with India Without her it would not have been possible to beat and crush Nazism or Fascism She played her part, liberated the enslaved peoples and returned without having achieved her own deliverance On the whole it was a loss to her with no compensation This was not after all a great loss when compared to the loss, anguish, suffering and humiliation she had been made to go through in other directions To begin with there was the 1942 August Revolution It was a regular campaign of blackmail and vilification against the Congress in which the casualties were admittedly found to be very high Many were broken in health for life and many were gaoled Some are still fugitives from justice Thousands upon thousands suffered voluntarily for their ardent faith in freedom Though the leaders behind the bars appealed to the Government for permission to contact the masses they were not allowed

Then came an era of bribery and corruption in public life and in Government administration A long chain of restrictions, tyrannical censorship, absolute controls without actually

controlling hoarding profiteering and blackmarketing were some of them. They created a situation almost unprecedented. Apart from the acute physical suffering that the common people were put to due to extreme want and privation there was a worsening effect on their morale. As though to drive these ugly aspects into the background it would seem there appeared the terrible tragedy of famine in Bengal and in neighbouring provinces. It was a ghastly spectacle which was horrible to look upon and the world would never have witnessed anything like it. Men, women and children fell down dead in the streets and on the footpaths like so many withered leaves because there was nothing to eat. Families abandoned their homes and aimlessly wandered abroad like phantoms. Husbands in utter desperation left their wives starving and they in turn threw away their children dead or dying. These were not stray cases nor did they occur at random.

Started in 1943 without being noticed or with no one caring to notice it death by starvation went on silently for some time. A few who knew it did not attach any importance because they considered that the world was living under the strain and stress of war which required heroic sacrifices and if some of them took to a novel method by which they could provide the men in the field with sufficient foodstuffs there was nothing more laudable than that. The Bengal Government when informed a little later explained that it was a seasonal affair whenever rice from Burma could not be had and that it would pass off without any one being aware of it at the event of harvest. Thus assured everybody began minding his own business. No one cared to part with the foodstuffs he had even though he did possess considerable surplus over and above his requirements for an indefinite period.

His simple argument was that if he were to give away his so-called surplus keeping for himself enough to go on for a month who was going to provide for him in the next month if the situation remained unchanged. With the stuff he would have spared a few could have lived for a month and after that he along with the others whom he had tried to save would have to meet with the same fate. There was no credit in that. On the other hand if he adopted the wise policy of a bird in the

hand is as good as two in the bush he would live securely and in due course something would always turn up. In his conception those who were seriously thinking of death—for them it made no difference whether they died a fortnight earlier or later. There was a difference, however. If the event were to take place earlier there was one definite advantage for all concerned. It would shorten the period of miseries for those who were involved in it and at the same time it would enable some others to live and enjoy the good things of life. On the basis of such arguments it was that hoarding came into existence and spread its influence throughout the country putting on a menacing look whenever any one dared oppose its view.

In this matter trading classes were not at all personal in their approach. Death by starvation was out of bounds for them, or so they thought. Theirs was a business with generations of reputation which required profits—the more the better—for its upkeep and development. There was the chance inviting them to join the campaign. Should they not go? There were the words dinging in their ears *Make hay while the sun shines.* These simple words had stood the test of time without ever being falsified. There was perfect sunshine everywhere. They must make their hay before it dimmed. They made it. Some businesses could not stand the heat of the burning sun in the open and so shifted to shady lanes and bylanes. Born thus, profiteering and blackmarketing soon attained maturity without prattling through childhood and did roaring business and made enormous profits. Profits always went to business.

These were the doctrines on the strength of which thousands thrived and lakhs and lakhs lost their lives. Could any one have encouraged it? That question is superfluous because it was about some of these profiteering businessmen that Mahatma Gandhi alluded as the geese that laid the golden eggs. We could have wished they were all ordinary eggs in which case the prices of eggs would not have soared so high. What a contrast with his usual democratic principles is this observation! This remark of his is not a solitary instance. Recently while speaking on the evils of profiteering Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru declared that he did not grudge the prosperity but he certainly denounced the profits. How can one prosper without profits? Did I not tell you that

the profits always went to the business and not to the men who handled it? That was their stand for the cutting of so many throats. There is a queried saying. If the fencing itself were to eat the crops whatever can we do? Similarly if our foremost leaders themselves were to appreciate such a reprehensible conduct as this what can the fellows who have no standing but their legs do about it? And yet had they been out of prison innumerable lives would not have gone to their death and our leaders would not have rested until the evils of profiteering and blackmarketing had been nipped in the bud. In life that which we wish is not what actually happens.

Going back to the Bengal famine we have already seen that a section of the public who suspected its seriousness were reassured by the Government that there was really no famine but a temporary shortage of foodstuffs due to the fall of Burma. The members of the public though not convinced were for the time being silenced and the Government did not take the trouble of investigating it further. However without having taken any steps to stop it the next stage was reached. As the availability of food became more and more meagre the number of starvation-deaths rose higher and higher. The contagion expanded the sphere of its activities to every nook and corner of Bengal—villages, towns and cities—without any discrimination whatsoever. The general public suddenly and shockingly became aware of the danger that threatened them. They raised a hue and cry as the public would generally do in the circumstances without getting response from any quarter. Even at this critical hour the Bengal Government put forward the plea that most of the deaths were due to malnutrition and they left it at that. Darker became the atmosphere and the known cases of death by starvation as reported in the provincial papers from time to time were showing incredibly high figures—thousands. If this was not enough cholera and small pox broke out in a virulent form and began taking a heavy toll here by districts.

Some party leaders [in the Congress party] who were not very enthusiastic in jingoistic tactics and therefore were out in the open found that it would be prudent to hold on

any longer without organising assistance to the distressed. They convened public meetings and expressed their grave concern at the critical food situation which was undoubtedly unprecedented and stressed the urgent need for concerted action by the Government and by all the parties and public-spirited men. While strongly condemning the Government's attitude of wanton negligence which had resulted in such a widespread misery and innumerable deaths by starvation they urged that immediate steps should be taken to procure adequate quantities of foodgrains from other provinces and Indian States as well as from foreign countries and for which purpose the necessary transport facilities should be provided.

Human beings are not the most adaptable of animals, and they are less so when they happen to be ministers or members of the Cabinet. In India the adaptability of these exalted individuals under whose protective wings the millions are supposed to be living is still less because there is no room for it in the age-old British tradition. In the past they used to be Britishers with a keen awareness of class distinction. Every other barrier they could break if they so liked and eat the forbidden fruit but not this—so strong was their faith, or rather, they were made to believe that so much was staked in it. It was not their fault, not in the least—that is my point of view. Speaking from the British viewpoint it was not at all a fault for a Britisher to possess this one characteristic over which they had spent years of labour. He was schooled and later trained for the exclusive purpose of making him a different being from the mass of the nation—in speech and bearing to start with. What more is there to argue about? This was and is still to some extent the system prevailing in England—a free country in every aspect with a democratic outlook. There was the Common Man and there was the Ruling Class Man, both British, with a wide margin between them under all man-made circumstances. That was how the British folk lived in their own homeland.

It was some of them who were sent to rule over India. The moment they set foot on the Indian soil they automatically became the ruling class—the question as to which strata of society they belonged was thought to be unnecessary to

look into and it was considered to be equally immaterial what job they had come to take up. The term ruling class was given a wider and more elastic meaning in India than in Great Britain. Any westerner—let him be an American a Spaniard a Pole—by virtue of his hailing from the west was accommodated in the family of the ruling class and so also the Indian aristocracy. For this kind of muddling the Indians alone were responsible and not the British. However the class distinction—baron and a commoner—that existed in Great Britain when it reached the Indian shores did not show any sign of weakening. On the other hand it widened the gulf naturally of course and so widely that the difference between a Britisher of some importance and an ordinary Indian was that which appeared to exist between God and man to say the least. This difference was religiously kept during all the ups and downs of the British rule in India.

Even where an Indian was appointed to a superior post it had been carefully seen whether he was born to a great position and whether he would be able to maintain the dis-

on drawn between the ruling classes and the toiling classes. The ability to do his job did not count if other things favoured nor did he lose the appointment for the lack of it. This was how the Indian administrative business was conducted. The Bengal Ministry during the food crisis happened to be one of this kind. It had no public support except that of the Bengal Governor and on whose initiative it was that the Ministry had been formed. They were a team curiously aloof from the mass of people and knew next to nothing about them. Being a set of sunshine politicians they were most unsuited to the task of facing the stark realities of a famine condition on which the lives of millions depended. They did not possess the requisite leadership to command the co-operation of the general public nor did they have the organising capacity to go and see things done in their proper order. How could such a Ministry wage war with the necessary force and steadfastness against the worst enemy of humanity—hunger? In spite of all the heart rending cries for help from men and women dying for want of food there notables did practically nothing to mitigate the sufferings beyond issuing a few

ments and holding out false hopes that though things looked nasty they would brighten up

As there was neither initiative nor enterprise forthcoming from the Government quainter the distressed public had to fall back upon their own resources—and that was starvation and then death. In the meantime, some of the leaders issued moving appeals to the Indian public for relief which evoked countrywide sympathy. The response was quick and substantial. Numerous were the general donors and philanthropic institutions throughout India who came to their aid with cash and other liberal offers of help. Relief committees under the direction and control of different institutions were organised. At important centres free kitchens were started feeding tens of thousands of destitute persons daily. To make up the deficiency there were established several gruel kitchens and cheap canteens. To give the helpless women and orphans shelter, homes were opened providing them with free food, clothing and medical aid. Provisions were also made by some of the foremost charitable and religious societies to accommodate a good number of Bengal orphans on a permanent basis in their orphanages. At one time the number of destitutes reached the colossal figure of 80,000, a modest estimate of the Government revealed. This was in Calcutta. What would have been in the rural areas? From this we can gather the extremity of the danger that Bengal was heading to and the enormity of the task for those who were making supreme efforts to handle it.

With a view to make known the real food situation to the Indian public who had been stupefied by the news of the sufferings of the people of Bengal and Malabar Dr S P Mukherjee made a statement to the Press which although was passed for publication in some modified form by the Press Adviser in Calcutta was banned by the Chief Press Adviser in New Delhi. His explanation was that he found it objectionable from the security point of view and thought it primarily designed to exploit the food situation for purely party ends. What an understanding soul he must have had! That it was the common desire of all sections of people throughout the country to help the distressed in the stricken areas was

well known and as such they had a right to know the facts in order that they might be in a better position to judge and adopt measures accordingly for restoring normal conditions

Taking the view that there was a bit of criticism of the Bengal Government Did they not deserve it? While men were dying before their very eyes they were seen fiddling To make them die happily? Again—the statement was stopped from going to the Press not in Calcutta but in New Delhi The Bengal Government on whom it reflected did see no harm in its publication and that was why they passed it Was it fun or business on the part of the Government of India to use their extraordinary powers in getting it banned? The Ministry then in Bengal was communal to the very core in addition to its being dangerously inefficient to meet the food crisis The public would have been acting within their rights if they wanted that it should be reconstituted on more national lines Were the Government of India justified in preventing the statement from going out? It was a totally indefensible position for them to take up There are several such instances where the Government of India made a poor show during the period of crisis For the sake of a few many have to forego their just claims That is what it comes to

The Government of Bengal did not continue their policy of staying out when they found that things were moving in the right direction without their initiation They join the campaign of feeding the destitutes and the poor and undertaken the entire construction of evacuee relief centres capable of accommodating nearly a lakh A portion of the stock of food reserved for the military personnel was spared for supplementing the growing demands of the needy public Arrangements were also made to purchase foodstuffs in the Punjab and other surplus provinces and to make them available in the affected areas without transport delay It would have been on all right but that was not to be Breakdowns occurred proving the truth of the proverb *There is many a slip between the cup and the lip* Large quantities of food came in from private donors or through Government agencies with all the abundant lack of a wartime transport system the moment they arrived in Calcutta The result was that

the relief intended for the starving millions in villages and towns never reached them. What an awful luck for the hungry and the downtrodden! It was due to the defective system of distribution—all said. Was it rectified? It was never done to the extent that it ought to have been done. Everybody kept on complaining and criticising with no one to come forward for setting anything right. In the meanwhile, those who would have died had there been no relief organisation went on dying all the same—unattended and perhaps unpitied too. Starvation-deaths are occurring even now—after so long. Newspapers contain occasional paragraphs. Is it not strange that in the midst of several millions who live on food a few are allowed to die of thirst and hunger? It is strange but it is also true. Indian freedom could have been easily won had the same number of lives been sacrificed for it—so tremendously heavy was the death-toll. A controversy was set afoot to fasten the blame for the food debacle. An independent commission who examined the merits gave recently their “not God-made but man-made” verdict. Now the Indian public want to throw the responsibility on the Bengal Government, the Government of India and the British Government—especially on the ex-British Premier Churchill and the ex-India Secretary Ameiy—and they in their turn want to throw it back on the Indian shoulders. What I say is all of them are equally responsible for it, not even God excepted in spite of the commission’s findings to the contrary. No good will it do to dispute over it now because what has been done cannot be undone. Will they hereafter safeguard the lives of the poor? Then they would have profitted by this bitter lesson they have learnt. At what cost?

“The old world is dead, none of us can escape from revolutionary changes, even if we would,” said Mr Anthony Eden. He meant, it is plain, that the world is in the midst of a revolution and there can be no return to the old order. It is a revolution that has taken place in the minds of the people and not a violent revolution. The change, ordinarily slow, quickens during fighting, destruction, suffering, and so on. The global war has changed the whole structure of public life in Europe. In India the change has been more thorough because of the new experiences that the people have been

made to go through The war the political deadlock the August disturbances the famine—all these have powerfully affected the Indian population and their loss has been the greatest during the last three years when compared to the other nations There is much to be regretted for the past and looking around there is enough for the moment to fill one with despair and yet there are rays of hope for a promising future which is not far off

CHAPTER VI

LONDON VISIT

India has one weakness—weakness for a soldier statesman. She is much worried and goes through a series of open agonies whenever she learns that a soldier statesman is to be in charge of her affairs. She does not feel in the same way for a soldier if he is a soldier through and through nor for a statesman if he is not hanging any military medal in his shirt pocket. Though not over much too-friendly to them she is not antagonistic either. At the sight of a soldier statesman on the other hand she is alarmed gets rattled and would have vehemently voiced her protests but alas her voice had been struck dumb long ago. What she does—she murmurs grumbly throws up her hands in despair and falls into a state of melancholia. If watched it can be perceived that she is trying to coin the incoherent words military regime military regime through her inking lips.

Where did she pick up this weakness from? Who has a soldier statesman been doing to her? The unhappy idea of hers belongs to the past and however much she wants to she cannot forget it. To get a glimpse of the root cause for her apparently peculiar frame of mind we have to go as far back as 1773 when under the Regulating Act for the better government of the East India Company the first Governor General

public knew him while he was in this country and knew his trend of thoughts and also the attitude he was said to have taken towards India's aspirations. Certainly that section welcomed the appointment. Among the rest there was resentment and irritation. They criticised the British Government for choosing a soldier to fill a civilian post when the war was on and when experienced army men were in great demand on all fronts. Were there not other men in Great Britain without the pernicious military qualification to be chosen from? they asked. There was no personal animosity in their criticism. What they were hostile to was the military part of it. They did not however reveal their own misgivings and fears as to where this would lead and to what further hardships they would be put by this malicious act on the part of the British cabinet. The time was come and they were coming to it but they were told that Lord Wavell the Soldier Viceroy was not of that sort. Ability, simplicity, sincerity, straightforwardness, broad mindedness etc. were some of his qualities and he was bringing with him a bag in which was deposited the key to open the Indian political deadlock. On hearing this description they must have thought that this was another Mahatma Gandhi engaged on the same mission as the real Mahatma—emancipation of slavery. They kept silent.

A new reign began when Field Marshal Viscount Wavell assumed charge of his office on October 20, 1943. Many were tempted to speculate on what he would do to make a new start if his hands were free. Such of them did not realise that so long as the Churchill Amery block was alive and kicking no Viceroy could keep his hands unbound or untainted. He had referred to his mental handling and had spoken too fully of loosening the deadlock. Some asked when? Am I in non-official circles the question was. Has he brought in his mental handling any plan for breaking the deadlock? No answer. The Viceroy thought that the time was no propitious to open or break any lock because the Bengal famine condition was deteriorating and the whole rim of Bengal was broken over. He left for Calcutta and made an inspection tour inspecting conditions arising from the food crisis. As the result of his visit the military authorities were ordered to assist the Government of Bengal in removing destitute from Calcutta and distributing

foodgrains in the worst-affected areas. Also he opened a fund known as "The Viceroy's Distress Relief Fund" to deal with distribution of money received for the relief of distress in Bengal and other parts of India. Though his handbag remained locked for the duration, these two acts of his within a few days of his taking charge of office brought him immense popularity among the public.

His next notable act was the unconditional release of Mahatma Gandhi in May 1944, no doubt, on medical grounds. Two months after the Mahatma wrote a letter to the Viceroy seeking permission to meet the Working Committee and if that were not possible there was the alternative suggestion that he might be allowed to have an interview with the Viceroy himself. The reply was "nay" to both. From this it should be supposed that Lord Wavell must have been receiving instruction, lead and hint from London with regard to the probable Indian demands that might come up and how they must be dealt with. Had it not been so he would not have taken a negative view being the man on the spot. It was not only he, but every Viceroy who appreciated the Indian situation and meant to do something about it, had been similarly checked from going out of his way. That was why India had to tread on helplessly for generations without ever reaching her destination. However, Lord Wavell stumbled a bit from public estimation by this incident. There was no further move to resolve the deadlock. The Viceroy went to sleep over his mental handbag so that it might not be pinched, and India, got stuck up in the political mine by her own follies, expectantly waited to be rescued by him when he got up.

Six months of spiritual slumber gave him the much needed rest and refreshed him a lot. There was the Desai-Liaquat formula awaiting his attention. He liked it. Then he remembered and saw the 'bag' lying intact and regretted the delay for its disposal. Should it not have become stale? He was not certain on the point. Wasn't it better to consult the London bosses? Next morning the waiting India learnt that the Viceroy had gone. Where? England. How? By air. What for? Nobody seemed to know. Where a definite reason for a p

action is not known numerous reasons are brought out of the A to Z file. They call it speculation. There is an end for war peace and everything on earth but not for speculation. It reigns supreme at all times and under all circumstances. Not that it does do any one good but it has an attraction all its own and the human mind cannot withstand it. In India it was in full swing. Starting with the theory that the Viceroy had gone for a walk after the sleep or had gone for a change and passing through all the stages that ingenuity could invent they reached a point where they claimed to know that he had really flown to mortgage India to the U S or to take sanction from the British Cabinet for setting up a military government in India. It would have gone on had it not been for the announcement stating that the Viceroy had arrived in London for discussing the war situation and particularly the Far Eastern war and that there would be talks on India too. There was disappointment because India was to be a side issue. It was however quietened down a little at the prospect of India figuring in the conversations.

Lord Wavell in England for discussions with the Cabinet set up his headquarters in the India Office and worked for long hours in an endeavour to crowd as much useful work as possible into his visit. He had private talks with Mr. Churchill and Mr. Amery and soon discovered that his task was not going to be so easy as he had expected. They both seemed to be unchanging and unchangeable on the Indian question. He could convert and actually converted to some extent the Government and several members of the Cabinet to his point of view but not the Churchill Amery combination. They were found deadly opposed to the idea of any slackening of the hold on India. Probably they felt that it would be a national loss for them if India were to change hands and they were quite unwilling to be a party to it. A strange pair! It appears that Lord Wavell wanted the Congress leaders to be released and ministries to be restored in section 93 provinces and a National Government to be set up at the Centre immediately. An emp's lie no seemed to have been the reply. Lord Wavell thought that his mission had failed at the very outset. Could he return to India empty handed? What would he tell the expectant crowd? He was disheartened. He threatened to resign and his resigna-

tion would have been accepted "with regret" but for the sudden termination of the European war and the crisis that set in British politics

The ten-year-old British Parliament was dissolved and in its stead a "caretaker" Government was formed to carry on the business. The general election fever ran high. It played between enthusiasm and nervousness. Mr. Churchill belonged to the latter category and Mr. Averay to a degree less. Power was abandoning Mr. Churchill—the war leader—on the eve of the Allied victory. The general election was to take place on July 5, 1945. There was no time to be lost if he wanted decently to fight it out. For the election campaign he had the war leadership to parade with and he could as well have the Indian saviourship. He handed back the bag to Lord Wavell with the specific instruction "do as you like" and wished him godspeed.

The Viceroy had intended to stay in England only for a week or two and had been quite sure that his proposals would be immediately accepted by the British Cabinet without question. However, in actual practice he had to face unexpected delays and setbacks. Not only was he disgustingly detained for more than nine weeks but at every turn he took, there was opposition and he was hard put to bring home to them his viewpoint. From the very beginning there was failure staring him in the face and yet he worked hard for the sake of his conviction. No labour goes without bearing fruit. Although it appeared that Lord Wavell's labours would have been in vain Providence came to his aid at the last moment. He came out successful and was happy for it.

CHAPTER VII

NEW PROPOSALS

Lord Wavell returned and the Indian public knowing that there was a Wavell Plan waited to hear all about it. No stir and not even a whisper could be heard from the official wing but they looked solemn and secretive. Tension increased and it would have exploded had it not been for the timely announcement that the plan would be unfolded on June 14 at the latest. That was almost a week later. Everybody was disappointed except the Indian Press. Speculation is its monopoly and time should be allowed for that. A week—quite enough. It started the campaign in right earnest and speculated lavishly. Interim or national government? Would it be a responsible government with joint responsibility? How would it be represented at the Centre? Fifty fifty Hindu Muslim? Would the parties agree? etc etc

While the Press was indulging in such unhealthy speculations Lord Wavell was engaged in secret sessions. He was sounding the opinion of his Executive Council on his proposals for a settlement. That was a wrong procedure he had adopted. Not that they were not qualified to offer useful advice and assistance in the solution of the political deadlock or in the setting up of a national government. To have done it would not have been in their interests. They did not represent any section of the public but at the same time they wanted to continue in office although they had no real power in the administrative machinery. This arrangement would help the British Government to show the world that India was being ruled by majority of Indians. Did it reveal the honest truth? Who were the nationalistic parties who had struggled and sacrificed for freedom and who really represented a major portion of the public come in? In his is not looking for mere offer but freedom with full power. By this move Lord Wavell lost a good percentage of public support as the atmosphere was vitiated by a great deal of unnecessary speculations which could have been avoided if he had consulted the leaders of public opinion immediately on his arrival.

June 14 arrived. His Excellency the Viceroy Field-Marshal Lord Wavell in a broadcast from New Delhi explained his proposals and India listened to with rapt attention

I have been authorised by His Majesty's Government to place before Indian political leaders proposals designed to ease the present political situation and to advance India towards her goal of full self-government. These proposals are at the present moment being explained to Parliament by the Secretary of State for India. My intention in this broadcast is to explain to you the proposals, the ideas underlying them, and the method by which I hope to put them into effect.

This is not an attempt to obtain or impose a constitutional settlement. His Majesty's Government had hoped that the leaders of the Indian parties would agree amongst themselves on a settlement of the communal issue, which is the main stumbling-block, but this hope has not been fulfilled.

In the meantime, India has great opportunities to be taken and great problems to be solved, which require a common effort by the leading men of all parties. I therefore propose, with the full support of His Majesty's Government, to invite Indian leaders, both of Central and provincial politics, to take counsel with me with a view to the formation of a new Executive Council representative of organised political opinion. The proposed new Council would represent the main communities and would include equal proportions of Caste Hindus and Muslims. It would work, if formed, under the existing constitution, but it would be an entirely Indian Council, except for the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, who would retain his position as War Member.

It is also proposed that the portfolio of External Affairs, which has hitherto been held by the Viceroy, should be placed in charge of an Indian Member of Council, so far as the interests of British India are concerned.

A further step proposed by His Majesty's Government is the appointment of a British High Commissioner in India as in the Dominions to represent Great Britain's commercial and other such interests in India.

Such a new Executive Council will you realise represent a definite advance on the road to self government. It will be almost entirely Indian and the Finance and Home Members will for the first time be Indians while an Indian will also be charged with the management of India's foreign affairs. Moreover members will now be selected by the Governor General after consultation with political leaders though their appointment will of course be subject to the approval of His Majesty the King Emperor.

The Council will work within the framework of the present constitution and there can be no question of the Governor General agreeing not to exercise his constitutional power of control but it will of course not be exercised unreasonably.

I should like to make it clear that the formation of this interim Government will in no way prejudice the final constitutional settlement.

The main tasks for this new Executive Council would be —
First to prosecute the war against Japan with the utmost energy till Japan is utterly defeated.

Secondly to carry on the government of British India with all the manifold tasks of post-war development in front of it until a new permanent constitution can be agreed upon and comes into force.

Thirdly to consider when the members of the Government think it possible the means by which such agreement can be achieved.

The third task is most important. I want to make it quite clear that neither I nor His Majesty's Government have lost sight of the need for a long term solution and that the present proposals are intended to make a long term solution easier.

I have considered the best means of forming such a Council, and have decided to invite the following to Vice-regal Lodge to advise me

Those now holding office as Premier in a provincial Government, or, for provinces now under Section 93 Government those who last held the office of Premier, the leader of the Congress Party and the deputy leader of the Muslim League in the Central Assembly, the leader of the Congress Party and the Muslim League in the Council of State, also the leaders of the Nationalist Party and the European Group in the Assembly, Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah as the recognised leaders of the two main political parties, Rao Bahadur N. Siva Raj to represent the Scheduled Classes, Master Tara Singh to represent the Sikhs

Invitations to these gentlemen are being handed to them today and it is proposed to assemble the conference on June 25 at Simla where we shall be cooler than at Delhi

I trust that all those invited will attend the conference and give me their help. On me and on them will lie a heavy responsibility in this fresh attempt to make progress towards a final settlement of India's future

If the meeting is successful, I hope that we shall be able to agree on the formation of the new Executive Council at the Centre. I also hope that it will be possible for Ministries to reassume office and again undertake the tasks of government in the provinces now administered under Section 93 of the Constitution Act and that these Ministries will be coalitions

If the meeting should unfortunately fail, we must carry on as at present until the parties are ready to come together. The existing Executive Council, which

has done such valuable work for India will continue if other arrangements cannot be agreed upon

But I have every hope that the meeting will succeed if the party leaders will approach the problem with the sincere intention of working with me and with each other

I can assure them that there is behind this proposal a most genuine desire on the part of all responsible leaders in the United Kingdom and of the British people as a whole to help India towards her goal. I believe that this is more than a step towards that goal it is a considerable stride forward and a stride on the right path

I should make it clear that these proposals affect British India only and do not make any alteration in the relations of the princes with the Crown Representative

With the approval of His Majesty's Government and after consultation with my Council orders have been given for the immediate release of the members of the Working Committee of Congress who are still in detention. I propose to leave the final decision about the others still under detention as the result of the 1942 disturbances to the new Central Government if formed and to the provincial Governments

The appropriate time for fresh elections for the Central and Provincial legislatures will be discussed at the conference

Finally I would ask you all to help in creating the atmosphere of goodwill and mutual confidence that is essential if we are to make progress. The destiny of this great country and of the many millions who live in it depend on the wisdom and

good understanding of the leaders, both of action and of thought, British and Indian, at this critical moment of India's history

India's military reputation never stood higher in the world than it does at present, thanks to the exploits of her sons drawn from all parts of the country. Her representatives at international conferences have won high regard for their statesmanlike attitude. Sympathy for India's aspirations and progress towards prosperity was never greater or more widespread. We have thus great assets if we can use them wisely. But it will not be easy, it will not be quick. There is very much to do, there are many pitfalls and dangers. There is on all sides something to forgive and forget.

I believe in the future of India, and as far as in me lies will further her greatness. I ask you all for your cooperation and goodwill.

It sounds all right—I mean the Viceroy's speech. It is a picturesquely-worded, frank and heartening oration without being glamorous. There is an amount of sincerity all through but its true value cannot be assessed unless we have traversed the whole distance and contacted the results. Bluntness of "take it or leave it" is not much in evidence although it asserts that if it does not succeed it would have to continue its existence as before. Rather a bit discouraging. It seems to strike the right note when it makes a direct appeal to "forgive and forget". And yet with all its rosiness there is a thorn in the expression "Caste Hindus" which is apt to chill any sensitive ear. Every Hindu has a caste whether it is high or low and as such it is absurd and meaningless to use the term "caste" for any one section of the Hindus. If it had ever been used it must have been used in private life either for boast or for prejudicing another section of the community. Strictly speaking, it is an Indian slang. Is it fair to pitch upon a country's slang while making a public announcement as if there is no other apt expression to bring out the meaning intended? That is a way of the British when they come to solve the Indian

problem and there is no why I do not feel that the Viceroy is responsible for it but I suspect the hand of Mr Amery when going through the draft for approval If it has escaped his notice by some pr occupation which I doubt very much there is always Mr Churchill with his famous lighted cigar to detect the point of omission in the British policy towards India and do the needful

The Viceroy is right when he says that this is not an attempt to impose a constitutional settlement So far as the British are concerned they would like things in India to go on as they are What they are worried about is not the non settlement but the ultimate settlement when it comes in spite of their wish against it Lord Wavell is trying to convince the world that the communal issue is the main stumbling block in the way of any constitutional arrangement that might be attempted in India Well without being told the world knows what the real stumbling block is and if that is removed there will be perfect agreement among all communities It is for the British to do it Would they? Then the Viceroy suggests that India has great opportunities to be taken and great problems to be solved which require a common effort by the leading men of all parties This is not so new as it would seem For the last two centuries India has been at it—intending to seize opportunities and making strenuous attempts to solve her problems—without making much headway Every time she is on the point of success there is a fling at her of Caste Hindu type How can she ever do anything in this atmosphere? Unless the cause is eliminated disease will have to persist In the present case it is the cause that is asking for its removal How wonderful! Is it so much fed up? Would it extend its good will and cooperation? As regards the common effort by the leading men if it comes to that there is only one thing for them to do and that is the overthrow of the British Is that what they mean? I hope not

Lord Wavell with the best of intentions perhaps calls into conference a number of Indian leaders both of central and provincial politics with a view to the formation of a new Executive Council more representative of organised political opinion Upto this point we can say that the proposed conference

is an improvement on all similar conferences previously held to the same end. None of the haphazard, pointless interviews with the leaders indulged in by Sir Stafford Cripps. No such procedure as the nomination of members by the Government of India to represent the British Government rather than the Indian public at the Round Table Conferences held in London. In the present instance, the invitees are in no way under the obligation of the Government for their selection and as such they can exercise their own free will in the matter of taking or leaving the proposals. Being the present Premiers and ex-Premiers of provinces and being the Leaders of parties of the Central Legislature their representative capacity is undoubtedly. It would have been far easier for the Viceroy to have effected the transformation in the existing Executive Council through the agency of these people's representatives. The innocent public would have put it down as a Desai-Liaquat joke developed into a Congress-League affair. For all concerned it would have simplified matters.

However, Lord Wavell has his own idea. He has considered the best means of forming the council. Over and above the invitations already mentioned he invites one to represent the Scheduled Classes and another to represent the Sikhs. Now there is his complete panel—the representatives of the Congress, the Muslim League and the European Group, also those of Sikhs and the Scheduled Classes. Out of these the Congress is known to represent the whole of India or it represents nobody, and the Muslim League does not, nor does it claim to represent all the Muslims. Apart from the League there are similar bodies like Muslim Majlis and Jamiat-ul-Ulema among the Muslims, who would speak for them? The Christians and the Parsis are not invited to the conference. On whom does the responsibility fall for safeguarding their interests? Then there is the biggest body—the Hindus. Is there any one to represent their viewpoint? Thus we see that there are many omissions—viewed along communal lines. It is meaningless to entrust the task of representing the Hindus or any other one community to the Congress. Its membership includes men from all communities interested and working for freedom. For the representation of the Hindus there is the Hindu Mahasabha. It should have been invited.

Supposing the Government does not want the conference to be based on religious distinction. In that case there is no need of specially inviting the Sikh representative. It is not to be taken that I am opposed to his invitation. But I am only trying to show the complications that have arisen on account of that. Had it not been for the Sikh and Scheduled Classes participation there would have been no question of the omission of Hindus or Christians. The people would have thought however erroneously that the invitees to the conference were merely political groups. The inclusion of Sikhs has given it a different colouring.

The condition laid down about the composition of the new Council is that the representation of Hindus other than Scheduled Castes and Muslims on it should be equal. Who is to recommend or nominate the 50 percent Hindus? If it is the Congress it will choose men from different communities including Muslims. But the Muslim League if left alone will not go beyond the Muslim fold. Even granting that a required number of Hindus were selected from among the Congress leaders their political views are such that they may not be in a position to look after the interests of the Hindus as a community. If this parity between Hindus and Muslims is based on the Desai formula it should be noted that according to that formula the 50 percent basis is as between two political bodies—Congress and League.

Then again there is the likelihood that the Government may have put the Congress in the place of the Hindu Mahasabha treating it as a Hindu body. If that be the case the Congress with its policy and principle will not accept that subordinate position nor will it take part in the deliberations. How then can the Hindu Muslim parity work? It requires considerable sacrifice on the part of the Congress to accept the term—not specified but implied—in the Wavell plan. In view of the conditions prevailing in the country however if it decides to work the plan there is the unhappy effect on the Hindus that they will not be adequately represented. There is a consolation in all this that after all it is a purely interim and temporary arrangement.

One part of the plan speaks of the Indianization of the Viceroy's Executive Council. All portfolios except that of the War Member held by the Commander-in-Chief will be transferred to Indian hands. They will include Home and Finance Departments and also External Affairs hitherto held by the Viceroy himself. These changes are no doubt for the better. To make it look more convincing to the Indian political parties it is made clear that the leaders will be consulted before the Governor-General makes his selection of members. Such an Executive Council if formed will be a definite advance on all previous ones provided an equal amount of power is also transferred along with it. However, that is not to be. The Council will work within the framework of the present constitution. It means that the change is only in the personnel without any shifting of power and that is not much. But even that is not without its psychological effect. Indians can have the satisfaction that they are not merely filling minor offices but all offices of the State. It is a practical step forward which will lead to the next step towards freedom if majorities and minorities can live and work together in unity during the interim period. It will provide them with an infinitely better chance of solving the constitutional problem which has been eluding solution since long. And also it will enable genuine progress to be made in social and economic spheres which require careful handling by national leaders if a complete breakdown is to be averted.

Another great handicap to the acceptance of the Wavell proposals is the retention of the existing power of the Governor-General to overrule a majority view of his Council. It was on the question of this veto that Cripps' mission split up. Now again it crops up, or rather it occupies the same prominent position as before. What does it mean? It looks as if the British people are not serious about getting the Congress to accept the offer. Whatever it may be, India can no longer rely on mere appearances for rejecting the scheme without giving it a sincere trial. She has a tremendous part to play in the moulding of the new world and the acceptance of the present offer will enable her all the sooner to play her part. There is the restrictive element of a Viceroy's veto. Whether it will prove to be a hindrance to smooth working depends on how it is to be

exercised. With regard to that Lord Wavell has given his solemn assurance that it will of course not be exercised unreasonably. That should allay Indian fears to some extent.

To prosecute the war against Japan with the utmost energy till Japan is utterly defeated is one of the main tasks before the new Executive Council. This is quite believable because it should have been this very factor of a Japanese war which must have compelled the British Government to create the Wavell proposals. If it is not for the Far Eastern situation and the impending British election Lord Wavell would have failed in his mission. The other tasks of postwar development and the search for a permanent constitution mentioned in the plan are mere inducements to the Indian public.

One step proposed by His Majesty's Government is the appointment of a British High Commissioner in India to represent particular interests of the United Kingdom. In connection with this appointment Mr Amery in the House of Commons said: Under the present conditions there is always the possibility that the Viceroy might on a particular occasion be placed in dealing with his Council in the ambiguous and even embarrassing dual position of being both concerned as the head of the Government of India with the defence of Indian interests and at the same time with representing the specific material interests of this country. A United Kingdom High Commissioner on the other hand would be free as in the Dominions to discuss and negotiate with the Government of India on a footing of complete equality but also of complete frankness. It is a fact that the Viceroy's position will be a bit peculiar when confronted with two opposing interests—those of India and Great Britain. He will have to defend the one and at the same time yield to the other. In such a circumstance the presence of a British High Commissioner will be of immense value so far as the Viceroy is concerned. Will it be helpful to India?

If it is a question of defending Indian interests against those of any other nation than Great Britain it would have been easy for the Viceroy to do it himself without help. His sense of responsibility and obligation would

have been a sufficient guarantee for his acting in India's favour. Can he be expected to behave in the same way unbiased when it is a matter between India and Britain? We have to remember that he is first of all a Britisher, and his natural leanings therefore will be more towards his own home-country than a country he governs. It is against this background in human nature which admits of few exceptions that the activities of a High Commissioner are found necessary. Who is he? He too is a Briton with British interests foremost in his mind. A Viceroy may have to exercise some self-restraint where there is a clash of interests between the two countries but not a High Commissioner. He can openly fight out his case and so long as there is a chance of success the Viceroy can remain aloof and watch. However, the moment he finds that there is something wrong he can interfere and set it right or put an end to it. The power he wields for the protection of minorities enables him though indirectly to accomplish this. Hence it is that the appointment of a High Commissioner gives India the appearance of a Dominion without any substantial advantages accompanying it.

The crucial point in the Wavell plan is that "if the meeting should unfortunately fail, we must carry on as at present until the parties are ready to come together. The existing Executive Council, which has done such valuable work for India, will continue it if other arrangements cannot be agreed." Is it a tribute to the members of the present Council who have been so good as to set aside every other consideration and take up the reins of Government and act bravely upto the expectations of the British authorities in quelling the August disturbances and creating the Bengal famine conditions? Or is it a timely hint to them in recognition of their meritorious services rendered during the war that their cushy jobs are safe in British hands so long as they have an atom of power left over India? In either case, Lord Wavell is anticipating failure of his proposals; and he appears to be taking precautionary measures when he says that the Government "must carry on as at present." With all his optimistic outlook and oft-repeated sympathy with India's aspirations he seems to waver when he is on the threshold of success as a result of his own personal efforts. He meets with his first failure at that point

How can he succeed thereafter? It is very unfortunate that he has been swept away by a feeling of defeatism at a critical moment. Giving a time limit to the life of the present Executive Council he says that it will be continued until the parties are ready to come together. Why should he suppose that they would come together again when they have once come and departed? Whose fault is it if they have to go empty handed? However there is a threat or a pretension meant for some one or other in those apparently obscure words. It is such language that makes the prospect of success in any venture slender from the very outset. By some curious chance it has been the luck of India that there was always something of this sort when ever any vital thing was discussed or decided upon affecting her. And needless to say that it helped to widen the cleavages among the political parties and secured an unassailable position for the British over the Indian continent. Is it the underlying idea behind the Wavell offer? If so where are we to place him and his obviously sincere efforts to see India free? How are we to believe his words saying that there is behind this proposal a most genuine desire on the part of all responsible leaders in the United Kingdom and of the British people as a whole to help India towards her goal? Has he been duped by his own countrymen? What other explanation is open to us?

CHAPTER VIII

REACTIONS

The Wavell proposals were well received and recommended for acceptance by one and all in India with perhaps a few exceptions. The first reactions in political circles were that it should not be rejected offhand and this favourable attitude was continued to the end. It is not because of its intrinsic merits—there are a few merits as already shown

which cannot be denied—that the Wavell Plan was unanimously supported by the public but because everybody, even the British people on account of the world opinion, wanted to see the ending of the political deadlock which had caused a good deal of bitterness between the two countries. The Congress too did not take the extreme view as it had been its habit. It has realised the responsibility it owes to the public. War, August disturbances, famine, etc have lowered the public morale and then enduring capacity. It is for the Congress which stands for freedom from slavery and want to take steps not only to ameliorate the conditions of the people who have undergone untold miseries by some of the man-made evils but also to prevent recurrence of them. Another reason that has induced the Congress to look at the Wavell Plan with a certain amount of interest is that there is a section of opinion which believes that behind the rejection of every British offer there is the Congress, and its unhealthy outlook retards the country's progress. This impression should be removed.

The following are the extracts of the first reactions of the public and the Press in India and in England.

Mahatma Gandhi: The proposed conference can do much useful work if it is put in its proper political setting and is at the very outset rendered immune from any fissiparous tendency. Undoubtedly all invitees might appear as Indians conjointly bent on achieving India's natural goal and not as persons representing several sections of Indian society.

Mr. V.S. Srinivasa Sastrî: The parity proposed between Caste Hindus and Muslims, each, interpreted literally and in its context, would preclude nominations by the Congress of Muslim Congressmen. So understanding it, I next ask, will Mr. Jinnah abandon the 'non-possessus' attitude he has hitherto assumed and allow this interim agreement to work?

I am not one of those sanguine patriots who expect marvellous results to follow from this interim arrangement, including the withdrawal of British control of Indian affairs, and the transfer of political power in its completeness to

India This is a vain hope But we must have a move on Let us safeguard the future and accept what comes

Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee There can be no doubt that the main purpose of the scheme is further to placate the Muslim League and to crush the legitimate political rights of the Hindus

The only object of excluding the Mahasabha at this stage is that the British Government and Lord Wavell know that it will ruthlessly oppose any scheme which is intended to sacrifice the Hindus and the national cause at the altar of intransigent communalism

Sardar Sant Singh It is too early to give a considered view of such an important announcement but my first reactions are that it is welcome inasmuch as it is an initiative taken by the British Government to end the political impasse. As an interim arrangement it should be acceptable to the country

Sir Cowasji Jehangir In Bernard Shaw's classic phrase the Congress have never missed a chance to lose an opportunity here is another opportunity and let us fervently hope that our countrymen of all political parties will not miss it again

There are two important points which we must not forget firstly that under any conditions that may prevail the country must go through an intermediary period before any long term and final constitution can be framed and secondly the years of experience in the art of administration that the country has lost younger men must obtain intimate acquaintance with the intricacies of government and the longer that is delayed the greater will be the chances of making mistakes detrimental to the interests of India

Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer This is a turning point in Indian history The offer that has been made by the British Government through Lord Wavell is both realistic and far sighted It is not intended to prejudice but to prepare for a long term solution of India's political questions

The search for a solution of the problem of Indian States has been postponed but it is fervently hoped that by unified efforts on the part of the states and by wise compromise this matter will soon be resolved—the sooner the better

Mr. Basheer Ahmed Sayeed: The proposals should be welcome to all parties. It is gratifying to note that this interim announcement does not in any way prejudice the permanent settlement of the issues between the major political parties in India

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru: My first impression of the speech is that it is excellent in temper and spirit. I sincerely hope and trust it may receive sympathetic response from those for whom it is meant

In my opinion although it (the proposed change in the Executive Council) does not technically amount to responsibility to the Legislature as the veto remains with the Viceroy, in actual practice, I think, if members of the new Government are agreed among themselves the Government can well work as a National Government to all intents and purposes and there may be no occasion for exercise of the right of veto

The one thing which will strike most is that Hindu Mahasabha has not been invited. If one communal body could be invited to the conference there is no reason why another should be ignored. Personally I am not a believer in communal bodies, either Hindu or Muslim, but if there is going to be a general settlement there should be no room left for grievance on these accounts

The expression Caste Hindus has come into vogue in recent years. It is a most unfortunate expression, but I believe nothing more is meant by it than Hindus who do not belong to the Scheduled Castes. I do not think, the Viceroy has, however, used it in any sinister sense

The conference must be called and given a chance to come to a settlement

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan As is well known I have never had any interest in parliamentary and constitutional matters hence I abstain from commenting when others are competent to speak I can only say that no freedom loving people could remain content so long as some sort of power rests in the hands of the British Government and unless full political and economic power is given to representatives of the people for the service of the poor and the needy

Mr M N Roy The Wavell offer is a repetition of the Cripps offer The Wavell Plan is a medieval approach to a political problem in the twentieth century Labour rural toiling masses and the common man are altogether left out of the picture

Mrs Vijayalaxmi Pandit I am happy to learn that India's national leaders who have been in jail without trial for nearly three years and who should never have been incarcerated have at last been released This is a move in the right direction and should be followed up immediately by the release of the thousands of political prisoners who are still in British jails

The Bombay Chronicle The Wavell proposals though extremely disappointing should not be summarily rejected but should be weighed well

The Times of India We can see no alternative except an indefinite continuation of the present deadlock if the present offer is not accepted by the Congress and the League We hope the Viceroy's request to all sides to forgive and forget will strike a responsive chord in every Indian heart

Amrita Bazar Patrika The proposals far from being a definite advance on the road to self government are more retrograde than those associated with the name of Cripps and present to us greater hurdles to be crossed

Eastern Express The Wavell scheme admittedly makes no concessions to the Congress demands which Sir Stafford Cripps turned down after needless wobbling

The National Call: If the Wavell Plan constitutes only a basis for discussion and not a case of "take it or leave it" we have no doubt that the persons who have been invited by putting their heads together will give it an acceptable shape provided the British Cabinet and His Excellency Lord Wavell are prepared to accept the alterations and amendments, some of them probably radical and fundamental, proposed by the conference

The Hindustan Times: No political plan can be judged in a vacuum. In view of all that has happened and the state of affairs in this country and the imperative need to tackle the transitional and postwar problems Indian opinion is unanimous that popular Governments must function immediately both at the Centre and in the provinces. Lord Wavell has made a sincere effort to seek the cooperation of the people of India on honourable terms. We earnestly hope that during the forthcoming parleys neither the Viceroy nor the British Government will consider any part of their proposals as a rigid and unalterable feature but will be ready and anxious to meet the wishes of the leaders.

Hurriat: The Government has accepted the League's totalitarian claim and completely ignored Nationalist Muslims, whose sacrifices have forced the Government to make the offer. It would be better for the Congress to die an honourable death than to participate in the Simla Conference as a Hindu organisation.

Tej: We welcome the proposals in spite of their defects. They will provide a fresh basis for negotiations between Britain and India and the parties in India.

Ansari: The undue emphasis laid by the Viceroy and Mr Amery on the failure of the communities to reach an agreement betrays a tendency to continue the policy of "divide and rule". The British Government cannot disclaim responsibility for the present differences. Britain has been compelled by its own needs to make a move. It remains to be seen how far the Viceroy tries to meet the Indian aspirations at the Simla conference.

Sind Observer As a half way house we must accept what is offered with such modifications as may be made at the conference of consulting architects to be held very soon at Simla

Daily Gazette Lord Wavell's plan has in it the genesis of a full fledged agreement between the Hindus and the Muslims in the Centre and in the provinces. Lord Wavell has done one more service. If his plan is accepted it makes it automatically impossible for self-seekers to trade in the name of India

Mr Frank Anthony I wish the proposals every success but I cannot help feeling that it would have been acceptable to all parties and removed all ground for resentment and criticism if the remaining three recognised minorities namely the Anglo Indians the Christians and the Parsia had also been invited

Sir Stafford Cripps Ever since my visit to India in 1942 I have hoped that some way might be found towards a solution of this difficult problem and I have done my best to help in resolving the impasse which has gradually increased in severity since the autumn of 1942. I am particularly delighted that the Secretary of State has been able to announce the release of the members of the Congress Working Committee from detention and I hope that all other political detainees will quickly gain their freedom at the hands of the Central and Provincial Governments of India

I welcome wholeheartedly the suggestions which have been put forward in the White Paper. They may not appear to be spectacular in terms of legislation but they are indeed far reaching adjustments of the constitutional position in the same way British India will be able to nominate its own representatives to international conferences—a factor which may be of the greatest importance in the settlement of problems arising out of the Far Eastern war

With the Congress leaders once more free after their years of embittering confinement let us humbly trust that we may arrive at a deeper and more sincere understanding of their self

sacrificing patriotism for their country, a patriotism which has led them into years of patient suffering. For it is only if we can appreciate their motives of loyalty to the Indian people that we can expect them to understand the honest reasons for our actions, which must often have seemed to them to be so mistaken and unjust.

New Statesman & Nation: By boldly taking the initiative Lord Wavell has broken Indian deadlock in the only possible way. Already leaders of the Congress are free, the ban upon its activities is lifted and the years of coercion have come to an end. In the near future we may expect resumption in all provinces of self-government that has been interrupted over the greater part of the peninsula since 1939.

Indians would, to our thinking, make a grave mistake if they were to distrust or dismiss this offer because in law the Viceroy's veto still stands. It could come into action only if they were gravely disunited. So soon as their union is achieved their freedom is an accomplished fact.

Spectator: The offer is a bold expression of trust and as such it has already made a deep impression in India, though Mr Gandhi and Mr Jinnah are acting with characteristic caution and reserve. India has now two clear offers before it, one for the present and one for the future. The leaders should be left with no excuse for not realising that if they are really intent on full self-government it is theirs for the taking.

Daily Worker: What is going to matter is what India herself thinks of them. The release of the detained members of the Congress Working Committee, long overdue, is welcome as an essential preliminary to any serious new effort to reach an agreement. But the haggling and reluctant spirit in which Mr Amery has approached this act of elementary justice is shown by the deferment of the release of several hundred lesser detainees, including many communist prisoners, until after the proposed new conversation.

Daily Sketch: If the proposals are not accepted—and experience allows no excessive optimism on that score—then once

again Indians will cut off their noses to spite their faces The next move is with Indians

News Chronicle Lord Wavell has taken the essential step forward The Simla conference if all goes well will bring full self government for India well within its sight

The Times The formation of an interim Indian National Government on the lines suggested by the recent proposals of the British Government in addition to its immediate practical advantages would open up the straight road to national autonomy

Such a Government would familiarise Indian statesmen with the internal and external tasks which demand a solution it would afford an opportunity of arriving at a communal settlement for agreeing upon the principles of the new constitution and for drafting the practical terms of the future treaty with Britain It would enable genuine progress to be made in economic and social policy with the assurance that plans would be carried on without a break by a Government that will inherit power from the proposed transitional regime It involves nothing less than the future of their country

The Daily Mail Lord Wavell will be congratulated on his statesmanship and the offer will indeed be welcomed by the British people who are ever conscious of the outstanding war services of India and gallantry of her soldiers This interim offer stands before the world as a token of Britain's good faith

Daily Telegraph Whether the advance Lord Wavell proposes would take place depends on the cooperation he receives from the Indian political leaders It would be foolish to minimise the difficulties and equally foolish to lose heart Lord Wavell has the satisfaction of knowing that this country is solidly behind him

Daily Herald The Labour and Trade Union movements have been pressing upon the self righteous Amery the urgency of breaking the deadlock But lo! something has happened

at last—and something good Let this be a lesson to us—no cause is ever lost

Manchester Guardian: If Indians are as tired of the political deadlock as most people in Britain are they will accept the chance now offered them of getting the wheels of self-government turning again.

If Indian leaders could bring themselves to accept the scheme, we firmly believe it would produce so drastic a change from bureaucracy to polities in the management of Indian affairs that the road to full Home Rule would become unexpectedly short and smooth.

New York Times: The British proposals on India are admittedly half-way measures but they prove that the British are sincere in their pledges to India and contradict the charges that the Cripps offer was phoney.

New York Herald Tribune: The British offer on the surface is hardly revolutionary The extensive powers which the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief possess will undoubtedly be a great handicap to acceptance of the programme by Indian nationalists Since these were the rocks on which the Cripps mission split, the extent of the British concession may well be questioned The British, however, have reassured them good faith and it would seem part of wisdom for the Indians to accept the scheme

Bernard Shaw: India is not my business In 1942 I said that Congress leaders should not have been imprisoned and if they are now released I have nothing more to say.

CHAPTER IX

LEADERS RELEASED

If there is anything welcome to the Indian people in the British announcement it is the release of the Congress leaders. This one act has gladdened the hearts of millions. Lord Wavell is chiefly to be thanked for this. Not that it has completely satisfied everybody. In truth it has not. Not only has it failed to satisfy the public but also the very leaders who have been released after nearly three years of incarceration. The reason is that there are thousands of political offenders still in jails. There is no knowing when they will be set free. Unless they are freed India cannot go about as usual. For the public there is one consolation that since the leaders have come out they will secure the liberation of others. And the whole responsibility of seeing their colleagues as free as they themselves are rests with them and until that is achieved they cannot rest and their efforts towards it cannot be relaxed. How can there be rejoicings unmixed with regrets?

The first thoughts of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on coming out of prison were of those who were still rotting in jails. He said, "My first thoughts are with those who are still rotting in prison. Against the grim background of suffering and humiliation it is not a matter for rejoicing that eight members of the Working Committee have come strutting out of prison. It is a matter for shame and sorrow that so many of our comrades are still behind prison walls. Their sufferings unlike mine have not hit the headlines. The world is tending to forget them. That is why I want to pay homage to those unknown Congress soldiers who have borne the brunt of the last struggle. How true are the words uttered in deep pain and anguish by one of the trusted leaders! And yet the personal freedom of the eight members of the Working Committee is a matter for rejoicing for its own sake and for the sake of those who are still in detention in that so long as the eight are out and free the early liberation of the rest is assured."

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru
Acharya Narendra Deo Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Mr

Shankerrao Deo, Babu Rajendra Prasad, Acharya J.B. Kripalani and Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya were released on the morning of June 15, 1945. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Acharya Narendra Deo were at the time housed in the Almora District Jail. They were received by a large crowd as they came out and were profusely garlanded. In the course of an interview Pandit Nehru said "Whatever changes take place, internal or external, the fundamental objectives and principles remain the same.. For us in India those objectives can be stated as Indian independence and freedom within the large context of the freedom and cooperation of other nations and peoples" Referring to the Bengal famine he added "For us political and economic freedom are intertwined as they are in every other country The terrible tragedy of the Bengal famine, as ghastly, if not more so, as anything has happened in the year, is not only the final judgment on British rule in India but is also a death-warrant on the economic order which produces such tragedies "

Maulana Azad had been detained in a house called Ram Niwas converted into a special jail at Bankura. Anticipating his release soon after the Viceregal broadcast large crowds had collected in front of the house but they, however, had to disperse disappointed as the thing expected did not take place at night. Next morning he received the release order with a smile from the District Magistrate to whom he requested that he might be allowed to stay on for the day in the same place of detention pending arrangements for his journey to Calcutta which was granted. During an interview he held that the then Provincial, Central and British Governments were responsible for "the man-made famine" of Bengal. He regretted that while thousands had been dying in the streets of Calcutta the India Secretary Amery was trying to assure the world that there was no famine in Bengal. "We have had many wounds indeed in our national life. But this—Bengal famine—is such a one that it will take years to be cured," he declared

From the Yerwada Central Jail were released Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mr Shankerrao Deo, the former clad in spotless 'khadi' with a 'chaddar' wrapped round him. There were a large number of Congressmen waiting at the gate to

met him. After garlanding he was taken to the local residence of a Congress colleague from whence he proceeded to Panchgani where Mahatma Gandhi was residing for reasons of health. This was his first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi since August 9, 1943. Sardar Patel was in good health so far as his own admission went but he declined to comment on anything until he had time to study the situation in the country. It was he as the chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board who had guided the destinies of seven provinces till the Ministries resigned at the outbreak of the war.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya came out of the Vellore Central Jail with a bunch of flowers and a *charkha*. While waiting for a taxi he joked with Pressmen who questioned him whether he would miss the bus this time. He replied laughing, 'I hope not.' He was taken to the Vellore Municipal Hall where he met and talked with a large number of callers. Though he was not willing to say anything about the Viceregal broadcast he said that the step taken by the Government reminded him of the release of the Working Committee members fifteen and a half years ago during Lord Irwin's time for the inauguration of what was then called as the Gandhi Irwin Pact. Strangely enough history repeated itself he said and added with emphasis that he for one had always felt in the jail that it was not for the Congress to loosen or resolve the deadlock but it was for the other side to do it. When the conditions demanded of the Congress were recalled that it should express regret for the past undertake cooperation in the present and offer guarantees for the future and when the transformations that those conditions had undergone periodically were studied and ultimately when it was found that the Government felt called upon to take the step they had taken it would be admitted that the policy of time and patience pursued by the Working Committee had been the right policy all along. Mr. V. M. Obeidullah President of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee garlanded him with a khaddar garland on behalf of the local Congressmen.

Acharya J. B. Kripalani General Secretary of the Indian National Congress was released from the Karachi Jail. He had in his hand a small national flag he had brought from Ahmednagar. The waiting crowd greeted him and the local

Congress leaders received and garlanded him. He then motored to his brother's house at Karachi. At a Press conference held later he said that as a member of the Congress Working Committee it was not proper for him to express any opinion on the Viceroy's proposals. On being asked whether he would favour the policy of accepting whatever little was offered he replied "Does it mean that if you do not get good and artistic pictures you should decorate your house with inartistic pictures?" To another question whether the Congress Working Committee had fixed any programme before their arrest he said that they had not fixed any programme. If any one had started any movement it was on his individual responsibility. The Congress had nothing to do with it.

Dr Rajendra Prasad was released from Bankipore Jail

June 20, 1945 was politically the most important day of the year for Bombay. It was on that day that after three years of separation the reunion of the members of the Working Committee was fixed to take place, the occasion being utilised for the consideration of the Wavell proposals. That day proved to be the rainiest day of the monsoon, the rain begun pouring down in torrents from early morning persisted upto the very evening giving a hell of a time to the enthusiastic thousands who had collected in the vicinity of the Victoria Terminus to welcome the illustrious visitors to the city. The unexpected downpour could not, however, detract them from their resolve. The crowds grew thicker as the rain became heavier and when the trains carrying the leaders steamed in there was such a rush that several people were crushed into unconsciousness and the leaders themselves had to be carried shoulder high right through the platform. This was the kind of reception that the leaders were given wherever they went. Is it an indication that the Congress politics has been crushed as some say? Regarding this Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru observed while addressing a large gathering at Allahabad "Some people say the Congress has been crushed or is dead, never believe in it. And the reception which you have given to me today or the one which I have received at Lucknow confirms my belief."

The Congress Working Committee met on June 21 with Maulana Azad the Congress President presiding and Mahatma Gandhi attending by special invitation. The time at its disposal being very limited the Committee straightaway plunged into a discussion of the Wavell plan. Several members participated in the general discussion that followed. The Wavell proposals were compared with the demand made by the All India Congress Committee in its 1942 August resolution. It contained two parts the first of which set out India's national demand—complete independence—and the second called upon Mahatma Gandhi to assume leadership to implement that demand. In view of the changed conditions it might be taken that the second part did not exist but no so the first. Any scheme before it could be used for resolving the political deadlock must be tested and seen whether it satisfied the fundamentals of the national demand. In this the Committee was guided by the changed situation in the country and was generally inclined to accept any proposal which would enable India to continue her march to the set goal. That is to say the Committee favoured the Wavell Plan.

Not that there were no differences of opinion. Opinion divided itself into three groups. There was the first group led by Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel which strongly objected to the use of the terms "Caste Hindus". In the second group there were Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who knowing the limitations of the proposals considered it not bad to give it a fair trial as an interim measure. They did not share the same objection to the term

"Caste Hindus" as those of the first group. Then there was the third group headed by Mr C Rajagopalachari and Mr Bhulabhai Desai who found the terms of reference to the Simla conference wide and elastic and recommended that the Congress should accept it and demonstrate to the world its readiness to get on with the business. When all is said and done there is one good thing about the Wavell Plan. No Congress leader attacked it nor did he go deeper to pick holes in it. The general trend of feeling has been in its favour all through. In the course of discussion the Wavell proposals were considered against the background of the Desai formula and were found to be even better than the latter in many respects.

At the conclusion of a two days' session which was said to be one of the shortest the Working Committee passed the following resolution

"The Working Committee meeting after nearly three years of enforced isolation have to consider numerous national and international problems which have taken new shape and form. The Committee will meet again in the near future for this purpose.

"Meanwhile, while recognising the efforts being made to establish a new world order the Committee regret these efforts are being obstructed and vitiated by the ambitions and fears of the great powers who are often moved by motives of retaining their dominion over colonies and dependencies and preventing or delaying the freedom of these countries. The Committee are convinced that world peace and any new international order can only be based on the recognition of the freedom of all these countries and elimination of all traces of imperialist control by whatever name it may be called. The Committee reiterate their policy in regard to this matter laid down by the All-India Congress Committee on August 8, 1942

"The Committee have noted with deep regret and resentment the recent attacks on Syrian and Lebanese independence which are a violation not only of the specific pledges given to the Syrian and Lebanese people but also negation of the principle proclaimed by the United Nations "

CHAPTER X

SIMLA CONFERENCE

The conference opened in Simla on the day and at the hour appointed in an atmosphere of tension and expectation. It was not without its liveliness. Spectacular scenes were witnessed in and around the Viceregal Lodge—the centre of attraction being the venue of the proposed talks. On the way to it the leaders were loudly cheered by large crowds who had collected at different points enroute and on arrival they were met by Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Wavell with whom they spent a few pleasant moments on the lawn before they moved to the conference chamber. There was at the conference full attendance of delegates invited for the occasion. The proceedings began with the Viceroy in the chair. His Excellency made a short opening speech and India nervously but hopefully waited to know the outcome of the momentous meeting.

The thing looks awfully simple when we look at it now but it was not as simple as all that when it was being enacted. There was the fear of a premature breakdown of the attempts at a settlement before it ever came to a friendly meeting and to any profitable talking. There was also the anxiety without being pessimistic as to how it would end even if all the hurdles had been got over. Anxiety and fear have done more harm to mankind than any other human qualities. General unhappiness that we see in the world—is it not due to fear and anxiety? War and violence over which our civilization seems to have little control—how would it have come to stay and flourish in our midst but for the two weak traits in our national character? I wonder if this weakness has not played its part in the Simla parleys. I begin to feel it has when I think it out. However both the Viceroy and Mahatma Gandhi have been careful enough not to get overpowered by this dominating influence. But for them the Simla Conference would not have proceeded as far as it did.

The first objection to the Wavell scheme came from Mahatma Gandhi who felt offended at the expression Caste Hindus. Speaking politically he said there was no such per-

son as a "Caste Hindu" The Hindu Mahasabha represented all the Hindus and not merely "Caste Hindus" Even Pandit Malaviya who observed caste distinction would not like to be called a Caste Hindu Modern tendency in Hinduism was to abolish all caste distinctions and this he said he maintained in spite of his knowledge of reactionary elements in Hindu society He hoped that the Viceroy had allowed himself to make use of the expression in utter ignorance He wanted to acquit His Excellency of knowingly wounding the susceptibilities of Hindu society or dividing it He would not have dwelt on this matter, he added, but for the fact that it touched the political mind of Hindus in its sensitive spot and caused with it political repercussions With regard to the omission of Hindu Mahasabha he declared he was not certain whether it was the way of treating the Congress which sought to represent the whole of India yearning after political independence as a Hindu organisation and if it was true, which he hoped it was not, the Congress would avoid the whole show One thing he noted with deep concern was the absence of the word 'independence' in the broadcast

Another objection he raised was in connection with the invitation He took the stand that he had no *locus standi* to attend the conference as the recognised representative of the Congress That function belonged to the President of the Congress or whoever was appointed on a particular occasion He admitted he had for several years acted unofficially as an adviser to the Congress whenever required, and he was willing to assume the same position before and even during the conference proceedings provided his help was found necessary and the Working Committee agreed to it There was one more objection to which Mahatma Gandhi could not give his consent That was the fixity of parity between Caste Hindus and Muslims If it was unchangeable religious division would become officially stereotyped on the eve of independence Personally he could never subscribe to it nor the Congress if he knew its mind Parity between the Congress and the League he could understand but not that between Caste Hindus and Muslims

These were some of the issues dealt with by Mahatma Gandhi in his correspondence with His Excellency the Viceroy

who fully responded. Regarding the Mahatma's attendance at the conference Lord Wavell in his reply urged him to attend whatever be the technical position and suggested the possibility of direct representation of the Congress which ultimately culminated in the invitation of the Congress President Maulana Azad. Replying to the incorporation of the term Caste Hindus he stated that it was not used with any offensive intention. What it was intended to mean was that there should be equality between Muslims and Hindus other than members of Scheduled Castes. Subject to this he added the exact composition of the Council would of course have to be decided at the conference.

On the question of independence he quoted the Secretary of State's speech to Parliament on June 14. The offer of March 1942 stands in its entirety. That offer is based on two main principles. First no limit is set to India's freedom to decide her own destiny whether as a free partner in the Commonwealth or even without it. Second that this can only be achieved under a constitution or constitutions framed by Indians to which the main elements are consenting parties. As regards the demand of Mahatma Gandhi in getting the broadcast revised to bring it in line with modern Indian thought the Viceroy stated that it would not be practicable to modify the terms then. However he disclosed his intention to deal at the conference itself with any points requiring clarification. The conference he hoped would be held in a friendly atmosphere and without bitterness and there would be opportunity for all to enter into detailed discussion.

The demands made by Mahatma Gandhi were fully met. Why? Because Lord Wavell wanted that the leaders should meet. Strenuously he worked for it and allowed concessions where required. Difficulties were in the way but they were removed with a masterly hand. He rushed it through and he succeeded. How he managed it is not after all a mystery. It was his ardent wish to see the thing done that helped him on and his grimmest effort to that end did the rest. Had he genuinely desired that the conference should be a success and had striven for it he could have accomplished that also. Unwanted elements if there were any he could have got rid of and obs-

tacles he could have surmounted, and the resulting atmosphere would have been congenial for him to create a common platform on a firm foundation of goodwill and understanding. Well, it is doubtful whether he had any such idea.

Instinctively or otherwise, Mahatma Gandhi appeared to be favourably impressed with the Wavell proposals. There is nothing surprising in this. Three years of political deadlock closely followed by countrywide disturbances would have been enough for him to revise his opinion. To this might be added the general impression recently taken root that the Congress policy of non-cooperation had not brought India a step nearer to being free. These are by way of regrets for the past and there is atonement implied in it. There is still another aspect which influenced him to take a favourable view of the Wavell offer. The world has emerged from the war with full of revolutionary plans which when introduced will put the people as a whole in a position to decide how they shall live and work, what laws they will obey and whether they will live peacefully with their fellowmen. The very things the Mahatma wanted.

This New Order, as it is termed, is a process by which power is taken from the few who constitute the present ruling class and is transferred to the mass of the nation and is expected to be more conducive to human happiness than any that history has shown us. With such revolutionary changes imminent in other parts of the world in which the Common Man is to play the prominent part India can no longer remain isolated. She has been slack and stupid before as well as during the war for not having participated in world events. Is it good form to continue a policy which has been proved wrong? The Mahatma would like to have the course changed not only for the sake of India but for the whole world.

He has realised the fact that no stable world order is practicable unless the 40 crores in India are freed, and a free India cannot function by herself if other nations are not equally free. They are thus interconnected. He has come to think that under certain circumstances cooperation is an essential factor for success. The war said to have been waged for the

creation of a democratic world is over. There is a passion for freedom in every country with a prospective era of the Common Man in sight. It is said by the British Government that no limit is set to India's freedom in her gradual process of development towards it. Let it take years or centuries the progress will be maintained they say. To prove their sincerity of purpose they have for the present offered an Executive Council entirely Indian with but two exceptions—the Viceroy and the Commander in Chief. In these circumstances and in view of the future that looked more hopeful than the past Mahatma Gandhi thought it advisable to cooperate with the British in their attempt to end the Indian deadlock. He must have felt that he was helping the whole world to establish peace and mutual goodwill by this act of his.

The attitude of Mahatma Gandhi towards Wavell plan was one of helpfulness. It is true he raised a few objections but they were of a technical nature and Lord Wavell did not have to go out of the way to meet them. Because the Mahatma was well-disposed to the proposals as he found them to be in keeping with the Desai Liaquat formula which had his approval he converted the Congress to his way of thinking. The Congress resumed the thread where the Mahatma had left. The very fact of its agreeing to participate in the Simla Conference showed its readiness to contribute its share to the success of the constructive move that had been made by Lord Wavell.

Had it not been so it could have with its policy and tradition very reasonably taken its stand at the point where the parity between Caste Hindus and Muslims stepped in without giving room to the possibility of reaching a compromise. If that point was missed there were others. It could have demanded the release of all political prisoners still under detention in order to create a favourable atmosphere. It was within its purview to demand the removal of the ban on the All India Congress Committee and other allied organisations before agreeing to take part in the Simla conference. Nobody would have blamed but everybody would have applauded for the moment at least had the Congress insisted on the fulfilment of these conditions as a prerequisite for its participation. This the Congress did not do even at the risk of being misunderstood. It proved

beyond a shadow of doubt that the Congress went a long way to make the conference a success and it could not have gone farther than this //

Thus the decks were cleared for the Simla conference so far as the Congress was concerned. The happy result was achieved mainly through the efforts of Lord Wavell and Mahatma Gandhi and the credit goes to both of them. Mahatma Gandhi handled the situation in a helpful spirit and with the assistance freely given by the Viceroy cleared the obstacles in the path for the Congress. Lord Wavell too was not only considerate and courteous but also elastic—an essential factor for ensuring success.

The Muslim League leader Mr Jinnah accepted the invitation to the preliminary discussion on June 24. In his reply he assured the Viceroy of his cooperation and goodwill and hoped that the League would make its contribution to any just and reasonable interim provisional settlement. He, however, suggested postponement of the conference by a fortnight to enable the Working Committee of the Muslim League to decide its course of action in the light of the preliminary discussion. That he was waiting to see the Congress reaction before deciding his own attitude in the matter was the feeling in political circles. And I too feel it is not far away from the truth. There is also another explanation for the League leader's demur. He could not find any flaw in the Viceroy's broadcast or in the subsequent invitation over which he could raise his voice in protest, neither was he in a position to give some useful suggestion offhand. Therefore, as an interim measure he pitched upon postponement hoping to get further enlightened by the passage of time failing which he hoped to take a few crumbs from his rival groups.

Replying to Mr Jinnah's suggestion for postponement the Viceroy stated that doubts would be cleared in the conference chamber and that he preferred to adhere to the date originally fixed for the opening of the conference. His Excellency added that Mr Jinnah if he liked could arrange for his committee to meet in Simla. To this Mr Jinnah replied that until he knew the full details of the scheme and was in a position to place

the Mahatma? It is too difficult a task for him to accomplish in this life

Resuming our thread The Simla conference assembled at the Viceregal Lodge on June 25 at 11 AM Welcoming the invitees His Excellency the Viceroy in a neat little speech said Before we begin on the agenda of this conference the outcome of which will have a momentous influence on the destiny of India I feel there are a few words I should say to you First I welcome you all as men who by character and ability have risen to leadership in your provinces and parties I have called you together from all parts of India at this critical moment in her history to advise and help me in advancing India towards prosperity political freedom and greatness I ask you to give me that help in a spirit of broad cooperation towards the good of India as a whole

It is not a constitutional settlement It is not a final solution of India's complex problems that is proposed Nor does the plan in any way prejudge or prejudice the final issues If it succeeds I am sure it will pave the way towards a settlement and will bring it nearer The statesmanship wisdom and goodwill of all of us is here on trial not merely in the eyes of India but before the world I said in my broadcast that on all sides there was something to forgive and forget We have got to rise above the level of old prejudices and enmities and of party and sectional advantage and think of the good of India the good of four hundred million people and how we can best combine to implement these new proposals made by His Majesty's Government for the advancement of India now and in the future It will not be easy and unless we can place our deliberations at a high common level we shall not succeed

You must accept my leadership for the present Until there is some agreed change in the constitution I am responsible to His Majesty's Government for the good and tranquillity of India I ask you to believe in me as a sincere friend of India I will endeavour to guide the discussions of this conference in what I believe to be the best interests of this country On the column which stands in front of the Viceroy's House crowned by the Star of India are engraved these words

thought faith, in words wisdom, in deed courage, in life
ce, so may India be great' They will make a good guide
ui conference "

Many delegates opined that the atmosphere at the con-
ce was congenial. "The Viceroy has set the train of the
ience on the rails and it will now go on" was the signi-
t remark by a delegate which portrayed the trend of the
issions. After the Viceroy's opening statement leaders
arties made statements setting forth their viewpoints on
Wavell plan A general discussion then followed during
h Lord Wavell tactfully intervened and averted an
ward situation In the course of his speech Mr Jinnah
tioned the Congress as a Hindu organisation Dr Khan
b promptly rose to his feet and asked the League leader
ther he considered him a Hindu or a Muslim There would
> been a tug-of-war but Lord Wavell remarked "Mr
rah will agree that the Congress represents its members."
Jinnah agreed In his talk the League President maintain-
is Pakistan goal

Maulana Azad handed to Lord Wavell a memorandum
odying the main points of his speech The Congress would
pt nothing either as permanent or interim which would
udice its national character The ban must be removed
i the All-India Congress Committee—the final authority to
pt the proposals India must have a national army After
Japanese war India must not be dragged or committed
British imperialistic policies in countries in South-East
, etc The Princes' position must be defined in postwar
as they intended to be represented by the Crown Repre-
sative in those plans

So far as can be ascertained this is the story of the first
's proceedings There are other versions too of a speculative
acter differing in procedure but not in effect They were
en rise to simply because the authorities failed to issue
hentic communiqués The Conference adjourned and the
lers came out They looked cheerful if it meant anything
held separate meetings in their respective residences to
ess the value of the day's doings.

The conference resumed its sitting at 11 A M on June 26 After an hour and a half it adjourned to meet again next morning A Press Note stated By 12 30 P M the conference had reached certain conclusions and the delegates expressed a wish to confer among themselves The conference was accordingly adjourned until 11 A M tomorrow The conclusions referred to in the Press Note related to the acceptance of the Viceroy's definition of the main task before the new Executive Council and acceptance of the conception of parity of representation between Hindus and Muslims The afternoon was left free for the leaders to confer with each other and reach an agreement on the total strength of the Executive Council and the proportion in which that total was to be divided among the different parties.

The most important work done by the conference was to approve of the general principles embodied in the Wavell Plan for an interim Government Each party reviewed the possibilities of success and the contribution it could make towards a compromise with regard to the composition of the Executive Council The Congress decided to make the maximum sacrifice consistent with its honour trusting in the Viceroy's word that the interim Government would be the stepping stone to independence It also waived its claim to be the sole national organisation of the country even though it had an indisputable title to it The Congress did not want power for itself but it could not agree to any other party claiming exclusive representative character on behalf of any section of the people

The Muslim League on the other hand was in a dilemma If it persisted in claiming to represent the whole of Muslim India there was the danger of causing a breakdown in the talks There was also the likelihood that the Viceroy might decide to form a Government without the Muslim League provided the other parties agreed The League leader found himself pulled in two directions by his advisory committee on this question There was one section asking him to insist on the right of the Muslim League in the nomination of all Muslims to the Executive Council They were those who had no place in the Central or Provincial Governments to be formed

and therefore had no direct interest in the deliberations. The other section had an aim. Being the moulders of Muslim public opinion they would be called upon to govern the country if there was going to be a National Government. Naturally they advised moderation in their demands. They knew that if the Muslim League was kept out its strength would decline and become extinct. They were afraid even to think of such an eventuality.

The position at the end of the day's discussion disclosed that the claim of the Muslim League to have the exclusive right of selecting all the Muslim nominees to the new Executive Council stood, the Congress wanted that if the Muslims were to be five in number two of them must be Congress Muslims, and the Unionist Party demanded that a Punjab Muslim must be included. It was for the settlement of this that they were let off earlier. "Things are going on very well" was the remark of a League whatever he meant by that.

Public opinion was emphatic that all parties should show an accommodating spirit but the chief factors which constituted the parties and the public had a different opinion. They forgot for the moment that they were speaking on behalf of the public and what they were sent there for was for the common good. The Viceroy on whom depended the success of the Simla parleys was very thankful to the Congress for its contribution. He was aware of the fact that the Congress had made the maximum effort to forgive and forget and the League had not. Should the League refuse to come to terms would the Viceroy give up his efforts? Or, would he drop the League and go on with the job of setting up an interim Government? These were the questions in everybody's mind. In the evening Pandit Pant had a talk with Mr Jinnah and the impression of the former when he came out was that a Congress-League reconciliation was not easy although not hopeless.

As usual the conference assembled on June 27 but it adjourned till June 29 after sitting for an hour. Sir Henry Richardson and Mr. Bhulabhai Desai suggested that Lord Wavell, Maulana Azad and Mr Jinnah should get together and

find a solution to the question of the strength of the Executive Council. The proposal was approved by the whole conference and it was going to be recorded when Mr Jinnah exclaimed that since he had a talk with Pandit Pant in the previous afternoon he would as well continue it. Lord Wavell knowing the League leader as he did would have opposed it but courtesy required that he should not. And further if a settlement could be reached by private talks he was only too glad of it. Maulana Azad knew that Mr Jinnah was trying to be clever and yet he did not protest because he did not want to thrust his hand unless he was sure of the thing. Pandit Pant on the other hand reasonably felt that Mr Jinnah might have consulted his colleagues after their conversation and might be in a position to make an offer probably acceptable to the Congress.

Pant-Jinnah talks lasted an hour and a half in the afternoon and the latter it appeared did not even make a new suggestion as had been expected. Later in the evening Mr Jinnah went to the Viceregal Lodge to meet the Viceroy according to a previous arrangement. It was said to be in connection with a meeting of the Muslim League Working Committee. Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan revealed that these talks had failed to find a solution of the controversy in regard to the method of selecting Muslim representatives for the Executive Council. The inference is that the Viceroy did not accept the League claim that it was the sole representative of the Muslims of India. The way in which he avoided meeting the Viceroy and the Congress President face to face and settling matters with them was no credit to him. It was a ruse pure and simple as was believed.

Discussions in Congress and League camps proceeded on the assumption that the Executive Council would consist of equal number of Hindus and Muslims—5 or 6 of each—and four others representing other minorities. The Congress claimed the right to nominate two members from among Nationalist Muslims to which some Leaguers were ready to agree but others said they could offer only one seat. What the two parties proposed to do in this matter was to call a meeting of their respective Working Committees and place before them each other's points of view. It would be the task of the

Congress Working Committee to confirm the settlement about the Muslim quota and give directions as to how they should determine the personnel of the Executive Council and whether non-Congress members should be selected. The solution suggested by Mahatma Gandhi that the proposed Government should include the best men irrespective of party labels would have been the best but the difficulty was that the Muslim League was not for it. Even at this stage there was the hope that Mr. Jinnah might yield to the pressure of his colleagues and agree to form an all-party Government.

The Leaders' conference met on June 29 and adjourned till July 14 to enable the delegates to consult further, an official announcement stated. It meant that there was no agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. To give another chance to the parties concerned Lord Wavell wanted to allow a day more for consultation and suggested for a conference, but Maulana Abul Kalam Azad rightly said that such conferences would serve no useful purpose. The Viceroy thereupon asked the Congress and the Muslim League to submit the names of 8 to 12 candidates, and Dr. P. N. Banerjee, Master Tara Singh and Malik Khizr Hyat Khan each to submit the names of three candidates, and Mr. Shiv Rao to submit the names of four candidates. The idea is that out of this list the Viceroy would nominate his Executive Council. Maulana Azad agreed to submit the names within four or five days whereas Mr. Jinnah asked for time to consult the Muslim League Working Committee.

Maulana Azad in an interview said that though the Wavell Plan was only an interim arrangement it would open the door of freedom if worked properly. Much would depend upon the ability of the men who were chosen to the Executive Council. Explaining the Congress stand with regard to the selection of names he said that the Congress demand for the inclusion of Nationalist Muslims in the new Cabinet was a cardinal one and the Congress would exert its utmost to see that representation for Nationalist Muslims was secured on the new Executive Council. In order to justify the claim of the Congress as a national organisation the Congress proposed to nominate besides Hindus and Nationalist Muslims,

one Indian Christian one Parsee and two Scheduled Caste Hindus

Speaking on the Wavell proposals Mr Jinnah in the course of a statement said The Wavell proposals have for their basis laid down parity between Hindus other than Scheduled Castes and Muslims We have no illusions about this parity because on the Executive Council as proposed the Muslim quota will not be more than one third and in the whole of the Executive Council the Muslims will be in a minority of one third there will be Scheduled Caste representation Sikh representation and we do not know yet which other community or communities will secure representation because the strength of the new Executive Council has yet to be determined So is the case with regard to the composition which is yet to be determined Now as regards the Scheduled Castes their real grievance is of social tyranny and economic oppression in Hindu society but with regard to political ideal or political goal it is the same so far as the Scheduled Castes are concerned So the representative or representatives of the Scheduled Castes will not have any particular bias for us although I repeat we have the fullest sympathy with them and we shall always be ready and willing to help them to improve position socially and economically Therefore it follows that the Congress will on many important matters be safely entitled to count on their support

As regards Sikh representation they are already opposed to dividing India and their political idea and goal are the same as those of the Congress And so they are not likely to have any particular bias for us As to any other community I do not know yet

Then there will be two British members the Commander in Chief and the Vice-roy The imposition of this Council will therefore be such as to enable the Congress invariably to command a majority

It is clear that Mr Jinnah is not satisfied with the Wavell Proposal it cannot be the Muslim quota in the proposed Executive Council will not be more than one-third He seems to be

wanting just a half to make him feel that he is not cheated. Is he or his party really entitled to it? On population basis he ought not to have got as much as he has been given. The Muslims comprise less than one-fourth of the total population and as such it needs no elaborate calculation to find out that their legitimate share should be somewhere below one-fourth. And yet Mr Jinnah makes blind demands and sticks to them hoping that they would be met by those who are in a weaker position than himself and whose love of liberty is so great that they will not hesitate to make any amount of sacrifices for its achievement. Is he not making demands without giving anything in return? What has he or the Muslim League party contributed towards the Indian freedom movement? Nothing but opposition emanating from love of self. How can Mr Jinnah and his followers make such fantastic claims?

Apart from Muslims there are other minorities like Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Parsees, etc. Are they to go unrepresented? The population strength of some of these communities is such that it does not entitle them to have a full seat. If each of them were given a seat which is only proper in the new circumstances the Muslim quota naturally will have to fall a little lower. The fact that it has not fallen as it should be proves that the Muslims have been very liberally treated. Do they recognise and appreciate it? At least not Mr Jinnah. He has been playing the spoilt child all along and not without advantages. Many were the concessions given him on this score even at the risk of ignoring the legitimate claims of others, and yet he indulged in giving way to discontentment hoping probably to get more. He has been successful so far in that. Does he intend to go on like this for ever? If he does, there is no more justification for it. The time is come for stopping it. No party or parties have any right to dispose of the material well-being of a people as they think fit and no party has a right to take it. What I mean is this that the Congress has been yielding to the Muslim League demands out of all proportions, and the League is thus encouraged by the premier political organisation have been increasing their claims by leaps and bounds. This should be stopped. Neither of the parties seem to be aware that by these tactics they are committing an error which will lead to disastrous results. It

may be important to bring about political unity especially when the country's freedom depended on it but it is equally important that the price to be paid does not exceed a certain limit. To realise the seriousness of the risk involved in it one should remember that it is out of the common treasury belonging to the 40 crores of Indian people that payments are made. Those who stand to lose by such adjustments to win unity and freedom may not raise their voices at the present juncture. Is it a sure sign that they are satisfied or they are unaware of the injustice done to them? Of course not. A time is bound to come when there will be an agitation over this by the very men who seem to be quiet and contented. It will be too difficult then to tackle it without the tedious process of reshuffling the whole thing—a process in which the Congress and the League or any other party in power will have to forego some of their just claims if a settlement should be arrived at. This is also based on injustice even though it is of a voluntary nature. If not in one generation it is sure to find its voice in another and create the same havoc as its forerunner. The two leading parties—Congress and League—will be well advised to take note of it before they take the risk.

It happens that Mr Jinnah cannot see any difference in political views between Hindus, Sikhs and Scheduled Caster although he admits that they are separated in other ways. Unity is as essential in politics as in other spheres and if the Hindus and other minority communities can get on together in their political activities they are taking a step forward in the right direction. They will soon find a common ground and a common aim to work upon and the differences which Mr Jinnah now perceives will no more be found among them. Is it not worth striving for? Why not he himself thrust aside his unfounded fears and prejudices and join the union? It will be the closing of an unhappy chapter in the history of India. Only the great can do it. Has Mr Jinnah the requisite qualification to perform such a feat? The world has not been able to see it in him. What the world has seen hitherto is something very different. If he wants to show that greatness need not be thrust on him it is not too late in the day to take a plunge and demonstrate to the doubting public what metal he is made of. Has he the courage and conviction to do it?

Between individuals there is what is called jealousy. No need of going into the question whether it is good or bad. However, it must be admitted that it is a most natural thing to see when two or more persons are brought together. They feel its weight and act foolishly and go to— Does it play the same conspicuous part in affairs other than personal between parties and personalities? It looks as if it does. Mr. Jinnah puts it in the form of a complaint that Hindus, Sikhs, Scheduled Castes and other communities except Muslims are one. Even the two British members in the proposed Executive Council, he seems to think, are Hindus when it is a question of Hindus *versus* Muslims. If this is not jealousy what is it? Mr. Jinnah has been labouring under its influence for some time. Consequently his vision has become blurred and has lost the power of seeing things in their right perspective. We can only wish that he regained his normalcy.

For four hours on July 3 the Congress Working Committee met. The meeting was attended by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Kripalani, Mr. Asaf Ali, Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Mr. Shankar Rao Deo and Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad informed the committee of the conference happenings. They also told what attitude the Muslim League had taken up. The general feeling among the members of the committee was that there was no more to offer to the League over and above what had already been offered. The Congress, as a national organisation representing all classes and communities, was prepared to take on its shoulder the responsibility of running the Central Government irrespective of whether the League joined such a Government or not. So far as it goes this is a clear-sighted policy and there is good statesmanship and the Congress could not have done better. From every point of view it had the right to take over the administration alone until the other parties came round to share the burden.

The Congress Working Committee again assembled on July 4. It was a stupendous task for them, giving up their revolutionary policy which they were accustomed to and taking up the responsibility of government both at the Centre and

in the Provinces. Naturally there were many questions which required discussion and decision. Who were the fittest persons to be put in positions of power and responsibility? How could a government be produced as envisaged in the Wavell plan in cooperation with other elements capable of taking effective steps to create a machinery for framing a new constitution? What was the best method to ensure coordination between the Centre and the Provinces so as to avoid repetition of the events like Bengal famine? Was there no means by which the resources of the Central and Provincial Governments could be bent to pull the country out of the abnormal conditions? These were some of the questions that had engaged the attention of the Congress Working Committee.

By far the most important problem that the committee considered was the problem. What was to happen to the Congress organisation? This question was never seriously discussed previously as there was no need for it. The foremost leaders of the Congress remained out when the Congress accepted office in 1937. They controlled and directed the policies of the various Provincial Governments through the Parliamentary Board set up by the Working Committee. Because of this the Congress organisation functioned effectively. Was it prudent to do the same thing again? Could the top men afford to remain out? If they did there was the fear that the real purpose of taking power at the Centre might not be fully realised. On the other hand if leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Babu Rajendra Prasad joined the Central Government there was the difficulty of finding suitable men to direct and control the Congress organisation. The selection of the Congress nominees to the new Executive Council largely depended on the manner in which these questions were answered. In view of the importance of the matter under discussion the committee decided to seek Mahatma Gandhi's advice and guidance.

Another subject that was debated by the Working Committee was whether the Congress should submit a small panel of names and insist the Viceroy to accept all of them or whether it should submit a sufficiently large list representative of all

communities and interests and leave the discretion to the Viceroy to choose therefrom. During the interesting discussion that followed it was revealed by some members that if the Congress submitted a limited list and insisted on Lord Wavell accepting it *in toto* there might come a deadlock. In this the Congress would not be acting in any way different from the Muslim League—a communal organisation. There was also the point that the Congress had declared their intention to accept the Wavell plan on certain conditions. They could not do anything which would go against it. Moreover, the purpose of the Simla conference was to end the political deadlock. It was pointless to adopt a course which instead of solving the main deadlock they were engaged in would create another. Therefore the decision was taken that the Congress should submit a panel of names and leave the rest to the Viceroy in whose sincerity they had full faith.

During the subsequent meetings held on July 5 and 6 it was finally decided that the best men should be nominated for the Executive Council and that the choice would largely be confined to the members of the Congress Working Committee. Triple parity, namely, equality between Caste Hindus, Muslims and other minorities, was a feature of the list of fifteen names adopted. In the words of Maulana Azad the list was broad-based and made as representative as possible of all important elements in the country. The principles which guided the Working Committee in framing the list were three in number. To select men of ability was their first consideration, and there was their desire not to confine the selection to party limits, and the third and the most important was the inclusion of representatives of as many minorities as possible. The list contained the names of four Congress Hindus, three Muslim Leaguers, two Nationalist Muslims, one Indian Christian, one Parsee, one Sikh, one Caste non Congress Hindu and two Depressed Classes. The Nationalists, the Scheduled Castes, the Unionists and the Sikhs also submitted their separate panels of names to the Viceroy with the exception of the European Group. Sir Henry Richardson stated that the task of working out the new constitutional system should be left to the Indians to carry it through.

The difficult task of selecting men for the Council having been satisfactorily completed the members of the Working Committee turned their attention to the Congress organisation. It had stopped functioning since 1942. There was not the least doubt about the immediate need of getting it reorganised and revitalised. However a little doubt was felt as to the advisability of changing its structure. A discussion decided this point. No alteration was contemplated at the moment. Then came the question whether the Congress would retain or abandon the function of fighting for the independence of India if it took the responsibility of government. This question was as easily answered as it was put. Congress and freedom were like twins. They had grown unidentifiably together. The existence of the one depended on the life and vitality of the other. They could not be separated without injuring both. And so the thing was soon settled that the Congress should remain the Congress of old without getting flurried by the temporary shifts.

How could a link be established between the Central Government and the Congress organisation? In the same way as it was done by the British Labour Party. In England when Labour Party members became Cabinet ministers they continued to be members of the Labour Party Executive. Similarly the members of the Congress Working Committee would continue in the Congress Executive when they joined the Central Government and would do the duties of the Congress Parliamentary Board. The idea was that with the entry of top-ranking Congressmen into the Central Government the much needed coordination between the Centre and the Provinces would be secured. This in its turn would enable measures initiated by the Central Government to be implemented by the Provincial Governments with greater speed and without hitch.

It had been the practice of the Muslim League to wait and watch whenever the Congress was on the move. Is it to avoid clashes between the two? The results have not yet conveyed us that impression. Speaking from actual facts it may be said that the League's wait and watch policy has been responsible for more clashes than otherwise it would have

been. While waiting they seem to have little food for thought. What they look for is a little food for action which they get from the Congress when the latter has done with it. Even then they are not keen to know on what principle and policy the Congress has taken its stand. All that they are concerned with is the way the Congress wind is blowing. They are sure to proceed in the opposite direction which has neither reasoning nor aim to boast of. Thus it happened that when the announcements declaring that the session of the Congress Working Committee would commence on July 3 and that of the Muslim League Working Committee on July 6 appeared nobody was surprised.

The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League held its momentous session with Mr Jinnah in the chair. He explained the implications of the Wavell plan and reviewed the progress the Simla Conference was making. The two interviews he had with the Viceroy he dealt with at length and placed before the Committee his correspondence with Lord Wavell including the letter he had received asking him to submit a panel of names to the new Executive Council. After Mr Jinnah's speech the question was debated whether they should send in the list of nominees as they had already heard that the Congress had forwarded the list. Before any decision could be taken the meeting adjourned. Again the League Working Committee met and continued meeting daily during which though the panel was prepared it was held back pending assurances from Lord Wavell with regard to the League's right to nominate all the Muslim members to the Executive Council. They had not long to wait.

Mr Jinnah met the Viceroy on July 8 in response to an invitation from the latter for a personal discussion as it was called. The League President when he returned after the interview seemed to have looked cheerful and important and the League circles appeared to have described the Wavell-Jinnah meeting as quite satisfactory. However, it transpired later that the Viceroy had given his verdict on League demand of assurances during the interview. The League wanted that the right to choose the entire Muslim bloc must be vested in them. They should have a clear indication of the total strength.

and composition of the new Executive Council and the proportion of representation to be accorded to other minorities in relation to the Muslim community. They also required an assurance from the Viceroy that he would overrule the majority decision of the Council in case such a decision was opposed by the Muslim bloc on the ground of its adversely affecting the Muslims. The Viceroy's reply was short and to the point. He said he was not prepared to give any assurances which would amount to amending his broadcast and the plan approved by His Majesty's Government. Accordingly the League High Command decided not to give the panel asked for.

Although they made up their minds not to give their cooperation and support to the Wavell plan until the terms put up by them were accepted the opinion in the League ranks was divided. One group thought that if an interim Government was formed without the Muslim League's participation it would be a shattering blow to their prestige. Another group argued that with the Congress in power and the League in opposition the latter would gain fresh strength because the civil service and police would not assist the Congress Government to enforce law and order and the Congress naturally would have to come to terms with the League. The third group believed that the Congress had learnt its lesson and that the Viceroy and Governors would wholeheartedly cooperate in every possible way with the Congress and other parties who would form the new Government. It was against these clashes of views which would have become sharper if they had dragged on that the League resolved to stand back. Is there any patriotism in their resolve?

The final break between the Viceroy and Mr Jinnah occurred on July 11 when they were together for about 10 minutes. The former had not accepted the basis of selection made by the Congress and therefore had drawn a list of his own with the approval of Whitehall which he showed to Mr Jinnah. He made it clear to the League President that he could not be a party to the demand that all Muslim members must be League nominees. Mr Jinnah declined to accept the award. The interview terminated abruptly and the first clouds of the failure of the Simla Conference were released.

Later the Viceroy sent for Mahatma Gandhi and requested him to recommend the list to the Congress Working Committee. They thereafter talked over the turn of events and the implications of Mr Jinnah's intransigence. The Viceroy assured the Mahatma that he would consult Whitehall again and let him know his decision on the morrow through Maulana Azad who would be meeting him.

The Wavell-Azad meeting did not produce the desired result. The Viceroy told the Congress President in about 50 minutes that the League leader had rejected his offer of four seats, but he did not give any indication as to whether he would go ahead with the formation of a new Government in the absence of the League support. That the conference had virtually ended without achieving its object was the trend of thought in the Congress circles after the interview. However, Maulana Azad had something different to tell Pressmen. "I was hopeful, I am hopeful and I shall ever be hopeful," he said. The Congress President is right. Are we not still hopeful? There was nothing else to do but to wait for the Viceroy's announcement on the subject. They were bound to wait and they waited.

There were three courses that the Viceroy might adopt. After dissolving the Simla conference he could confess his failure to constitute a national government under his leadership. With the overwhelming support he had secured for his plan he could as well set up a representative government at the Centre and in the Provinces. The last but not the less important alternative was that he might postpone the final decision till the result of the general election in Britain was announced. These were some of the theoretical possibilities as to what the Viceroy would do at the dead end he had contacted. In spite of the wave of pessimism that was sweeping over Simla the popular opinion held the view that if the present opportunity of making friends with the Congress was missed it would never recur. There was, therefore, general belief that Lord Wavell would rise to the occasion and set up an interim Government and earn the gratitude of millions. In the midst of these speculations as to how the Viceroy would react to the situation created by Mr Jinnah the Congress continued

to respond favourably to the Wavell proposals and showed its willingness to join the interim Government and undertake responsibility whether the Muslim League cooperated or not. This was a fine gesture on the part of the Congress which the Viceroy should have noticed and appreciated it. But His Excellency could not take any action by himself until he knew the London point of view which he could not expect to get because the British Government was in a state of suspense as regards the result of the general election. Even if the British were not engaged as they were in their election mania whether they would have taken any timely steps to avert the crisis in India was a mere speculation. The situation was the Viceroy could not act on his own initiative nor would the British give him leave for it but the leaders of Indian politics who knew that under Lord Wavell's leadership they had reached a stage which required the Viceroy to play the hero fully believed that he would. What a disappointment it would have been for them when they found that the hero they had followed lacked in courage and determination to perform the heroic part he had undertaken!

CHAPTER XI

FAILURE

Did the Simla conference fail? It may be said it did or it did not. Even after the Viceroy had declared it to have failed and many a tear had been shed over it by the public including Lord Wavell himself there was a feeling of optimism that something would turn up. In that hopeful dream the shadow of the breakdown was ignored or forgotten. There was a widespread belief that sooner or later the broken thread would be picked up and that the efforts made in Simla would be fully utilised. The reason for this was provided by the

Viceroy in his closing speech at the Simla conference He announced the failure and took upon himself the responsibility for it. Then he gave hints as to what he would do next in which there were a few hopeful signs for the wary

The following is an extract from his statement "I propose to take a little time to consider in what way I can best help India after the failure of the conference You can help best by refraining from recrimination The war against Japan must be carried on and law and order must be maintained, and until I see my way more clearly than I do now, it may be difficult, perhaps impossible, to suggest any new move. No Government can carry on under the daily prospect of change or dissolution I have to secure the stability and day-to-day efficiency of my Government and it would be impossible to enter upon continuous or even frequent political discussions of this kind Whatever decisions His Majesty's Government may take in the near future must therefore in all probability hold good for some little time "

Look at the irony Lord Wavell had ample time and opportunities to help India realise what was uppermost in her mind—her political freedom He was as much interested as any Indian in seeing her free and had unceasingly endeavoured for it. There was the Indian National Congress—the only political organisation that could speak for INDIA—whose willing support he had enlisted For that very reason the communal bodies and other partisan interests except perhaps one had extended their cooperation in carrying out his plan. Between him and the success there was only one step. Had he taken it as resolutely as he had shown himself to be at the start there would have been no occasion for further "political discussions of this kind " But, to the surprise of everybody, he wavered, seemed to lose heart and ultimately turned back. It is true he could not have taken that decisive step unless all agreed, the announcement of his proposals had said as much However, there was no reason why he should have so strictly adhered to a pronouncement made long before he was called upon to face facts. Had he not said that his plan in itself was not the last word and changes in it could be effected during discussions? He could have easily erased that which

prevented him from going ahead with his plan. Success would have been his. Unfortunately he was not on the level of the task at the moment.

It is very good of His Excellency the Viceroy to have assured the Indian public that his efforts towards a settlement had not ended. That was a hopeful sign in itself. But mere attempts to bring about an agreement between parties with divergent views would not bear fruit unless one is prepared to face every conceivable emergency and come clean out of it. Apart from preparedness to overcome difficulties one must have keenness to a large degree and determination in equal proportion. Had Lord Wavell been armed with these essentials of success? Did he make use of them when the crucial moment arrived? If he had he could have resolved the differences on the spot and there would have been a National Government functioning in India. Its absence shows that he played and lost although he had all the trump cards for ensuring success. Was the Simla conference merely a British election stunt? It is difficult to answer. And yet there appears to be a close connection between the two. Till July 5—this was the day fixed for polling in Britain—the prospect of success of the Simla talks was on the ascent and thereafter it gradually deteriorated. What should we infer from this?

Having done his best to defeat the very object for which he has been labouring hard Lord Wavell is asking for time to consider the best way he can help India. Is it not a bit puzzling? Does he think that the experience gained at Simla would stand in good stead if he were called upon to deal with a similar situation? We could have understood this provided he had taken time to study the factors that had led to the Simla breakdown. That he had not done so could be seen from the fact that the idea was expressed simultaneously with the announcement of failure. Instead of promptly announcing that he failed and regrettfully accepting the responsibility for it he could have postponed the task of coining sweet phrases to serve an unsavoury dish. There would have been time enough for considering how best the impediments could be cleared away. He would have succeeded if he had

a mind to But the question arises Was it the British policy then?

In the same breath as he proclaims to the world the failure of his leadership in Indian politics Lord Wavell emphasizes the points "The war against Japan must be carried on and law and order must be maintained." There is no room for doubt These are things in which Great Britain is directly interested and hence the use of the significant word "must" The maintenance of "law and order in India at any cost" has been the first consideration of the British throughout their reign and they have been successfully keeping it They cannot change nor can they relax that policy even though India is being granted freedom It is just like caning a boy when he is being promoted to a higher class Perhaps the teacher who does it want to remind the boy what his lot has been No teacher would stoop so low but the Britishers would go even lower where it pays adequately.

When a Viceroy declares that Japan must be crushed he means it It is as good as done because there is a will behind it If he were to say that law and order must be kept intact nobody can misunderstand his meaning as he is giving utterance to the British will which knows no fluctuation in this matter Does he mean it when he says that Indian problems must be solved or India must be freed? He does not nor can he mean it because the Britishers are never known to have given them free will on such a delicate subject as Indian independence Through oversight or absentmindedness if he really meant such a preposterous thing he is committing an illegal act according to the unwritten law of the British constitution

Then it follows that the responsibility for the breakdown of the Simla conference rests—if any non-Indian element could be dragged into the affray—upon the authority in Britain and not upon the Viceroy as he himself would like us to understand However, it must be pointed out that the blame for the termination in a fiasco of the political drama enacted in Simla goes to the British Government so far as their deliberate omission to set up a National Government when

more than 75 percent of the Indian population has been clamouring for it is concerned. They have already safeguarded their position against this criticism by asking for the impossible in advance—cent percent agreement in a country of 400 million souls for the mere purpose of changing the personnel of the Executive Council. Can there be anything more ridiculous than this? And it is not so ridiculous as it would seem when we consider the loss that Great Britain would sustain if India is set free. In their anxiety to retain hold on India they have followed the simple logic. To make a problem impossible of solution one must be given impossible conditions to work on with.

Who was then really responsible for the failure of the Simla Conference? The consensus of opinion coming from every nook and corner of the world indicates that it was Mr. Jinnah. For the first time the world opinion coincided with his own. He did not try to refute it as had been his wont. On the other hand he with a touch of pride for his unusual feat—poor soul! he had no occasion to feel or exhibit this human trait before and therefore might not know that *pride goeth before a fall*—took upon himself the full responsibility. He said that the Wavell plan was a snare. To put him in for being a disturbing element? One would like to suppose it is time that a live snare has been prepared for the purpose indicated. Another reason he put forward for the rejection of the Wavell offer was that the fundamental conditions on which he had built his *castle in the air* would tumble down. What were his fundamental conditions? A seat on the Executive Council eh! It was as we know on that issue that the Simla conference broke up. He would have forgotten his fundamental theories and would have been sitting in the Executive Council but for the fact that the one seat over which the controversy raged was intended for a Punjabi Unionist Muslim. He could have hugged any other Muslim but not a Muslim of the Unionist fold. If he were made to do it in the dark he would have instinctively felt that he was hugging his arch enemy. With that enemy he is seen these days negotiating for a better understanding between them innocent Muslims! If they only knew where their venerable little Jinnah is leading them to! They will know it one day but only it may not be too late.

CHAPTER XII

PICKING UP THE BROKEN THREAD

Britain elected a Labour Government. Japan unconditionally surrendered. The Viceroy left for London. These incidents, each important in itself, occurred one after another in quick succession after the Simla parleys. Speaking of the first thing first, Mr Clement Attlee, the present British Premier, when the Labour party's outright success in the election became known, summed up the general trend of feeling that was in Great Britain. "This is truly a very remarkable and gratifying result." The thought and feeling that could be got in India at the British election result could not have been better expressed than this. From the moment it was announced that there was going to be a general election in Britain India had been expectantly waiting to know the result. Her one prayer was that the Labour should sweep the polls which they did. She was convinced that there was no chance for her if the Tories were again to come into power. Her salvation lay in the Labour victory. She prayed for it and got it. It was expected that a new era in Indo-British relations would be dawned with Labour in power and the friendship between India and Britain would be newly built in an atmosphere of mutual confidence. It was also expected that the Labour Government would set about solving the Indian problem with courage and honesty immediately.

Whatever had been the British Labour programme for India in the face of these expectations it did not materialise. The Japanese surrender closed the chapter on the world war and the need for any interim arrangement in India became remote. The immediate necessity, according to the new India Secretary Lord Pethick Lawrence, was a searching examination of the political and economic issues involved in the problems confronting India. There was no other person whose counsel would be more valuable than that of the Viceroy and therefore he was invited to visit London "to have direct personal discussion."

So far the Labour Government acted without shocking or disappointing the Indian public. They appeared to be very keen on Indian affairs even more than what would have been expected of them in the circumstances. Speeches and writings by responsible leaders and members of the Cabinet that frequently appeared in the British Press tended to show that the Labour Ministry was bent upon solving the Indian political mystery once for all and that too immediately. India could hardly believe these demonstrations of concern and consideration on the part of the British. What she had seen in the way of British demonstration had been police *lathis*. Now—this was a new and a novel experience. She could not give much credence to it because of her old unforgettable memories but when the Viceroy departed for England on his new mission a flicker of hope flashed through her mind. That is not to mean that there was jubilation in India but it must be admitted that there was general satisfaction. Before his departure it was announced that there would be a general election to the Indian legislatures in the next cold weather.

Lord Wavell arrived in London on August 28 and gave an account of the recent developments in India and his own views. For some days he discussed with the Secretary of State for India the main problems affecting India of the future. Then he met those ministers who were interested in Indian affairs and placed before them his difficulties. The news that reached India during the progress of the talks revealed that there was nothing doing. The British could call for a forgive and forget policy during the pendency of the war because it was a weapon that could kill two birds at one shot but not after it.

Here is an example of the message that came through. India must not expect—and there is no suggestion that she does—any announcement on Lord Wavell's return of a new plan entailing the recall of Indian politicians. There is positively nothing to suggest that there has been any departure from the Cripps proposals. The Cripps proposals all over again! If there was no move for a new plan there was nothing to speak against it. We could have thought that Britain had become lethargic in her disposition after her war and

political victories. A hard-earned rest. But to present the old proposals of Curzon condemned and thrown out by all in India! It gives a different colouring to the British attitude. Is it a revenge? At the least it looks like the old cook's trick. To remove the dish rejected for some reason or other and bring it back a little later with a pleasant face giving out the impression that he cooked it afresh.

Lord Wavell returned to India before he was due on September 16. Perhaps the important nature of the revelations he had to make on behalf of His Majesty's Government must have induced him to start earlier. As on the previous occasion he communed with his councillors on arrival and announced that he would broadcast the British Government's proposals on September 19 at 9-45 P.M. It is now 9-45 P.M. on September 19. Let us turn to the radio.

After my recent discussions with His Majesty's Government in London, they authorized me to make the following announcement:

- ‘ As stated in the Gracious speech from the Throne at the opening of Parliament, His Majesty's Government are determined to do their utmost to promote in conjunction with leaders of Indian opinion the early realization of full self-government in India. During my visit to London they have discussed with me the steps to be taken. ’
- ‘ An announcement has already been made that elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, so long postponed owing to the war, are to be held during the coming cold weather. Thereafter His Majesty's Government earnestly hope that ministerial responsibility will be accepted by political leaders in all provinces. ’
- ‘ It is the intention of His Majesty's Government to convene as soon as possible a constitution-making body, and as a preliminary step they have authorized me to undertake, immediately after the elections,

discussions with representatives of the Legislative Assemblies in the provinces to ascertain whether the proposals contained in the 1942 declaration are acceptable or whether some alternative or modified scheme is preferable. Discussions will also be undertaken with the representatives of the Indian States with a view to ascertaining in what way they can best take their part in the constitution making body.

His Majesty's Government are proceeding to the consideration of the content of the treaty which will require to be concluded between Great Britain and India.

During these preparatory stages the Government of India must be carried on and urgent economic and social problems must be dealt with. Furthermore India has to play her full part in working out the new world order. His Majesty's Government have, therefore further authorized me as soon as the result of the provincial elections are published to take steps to bring into being an Executive Council which will have the support of the main Indian parties.

That is the end of the announcement which His Majesty's Government have authorized me to make. It means a great deal. It means that His Majesty's Government are determined to go ahead with the task of bringing India to self government at the earliest possible date. They have as you can well imagine a great number of most important and urgent problems on their hands but despite all their preoccupations they have taken time almost in their first days of office to give attention to the Indian problem as one of first and most important. The fact is a measure of the earnest resolve of His Majesty's Government to help India to achieve early self government.

The task of making and implementing a new constitution for India is a complex and difficult one which will require goodwill, co-operation and patience on the part of all concerned. We must first hold elections

so that the will of the Indian electorate may be known. It is not possible to undertake any major alteration of the franchise system. This would delay matters for at least two years. But we are doing our best to revise the existing electoral rolls efficiently.

After the elections, I propose to hold discussions with representatives of those elected, and of the Indian States to determine the form which the constitution-making body should take, its powers and procedure. The draft declaration of 1942 proposed a method of setting up a constitution making body but His Majesty's Government recognize that, in view of the great issues involved and the delicacy of the minority problems, consultation with the people's representatives is necessary before the form of the constitution-making body is finally determined.

The above procedure seems to His Majesty's Government and myself the best way open to us to give India the opportunity of deciding her destiny. We are well aware of the difficulties to be overcome but are determined to overcome them.

I can certainly assure you that the Government and all sections of the British people are anxious to help India, which has given us so much help in winning this war. I for my part will do my best, in the service of the people of India, to help them to arrive at their goal, and, I firmly believe that it can be done.

It is now for Indians to show that they have the wisdom, faith and courage to determine in what way they can best reconcile their differences and how their country can be governed by Indians for Indians.

There is nothing of a revolutionary character in the announcement to arouse public enthusiasm. Most of it is already known to the Indian people through the Cripps offer. If there is any doubt as to its identity it is made clear by Prime Minister Attlee's broadcast. "The broad definition of British

policy towards India contained in the declaration of 1947 which had the support of all parties in this country stands in all its fullness and purpose. However there are a few points in the present declaration of British policy which might console some of the Indian minds for the moment. For instance the Viceroy in his appeal declares — We are aware of the difficulties to be overcome but are determined to overcome them. Did he not say something like this when presenting the Wavell plan? Probably determination carries different meanings in different circumstances.

Another consoling factor is the authority he has from His Majesty's Government that as soon as the results of the provincial elections are published to take steps to bring into being an Executive Council which will have the support of the main Indian parties. Could he have so soon forgotten the Simla episode and its outcome? Is it his intention to bring about another breakdown by treading over the same muddy path? Or has he been told by the London authorities that the leaders with whom he negotiated were not the real representatives of the people and only a general election would reveal the actual leadership? We need not be too critical on these points. Lord Wavell might have been provided with a magic wand whose touch would make Mr Jinnah howl. I want no seats.

Everything that is of any value in the Viceroy's broadcast seems to depend upon the results of the general elections. There is no doubt that it will serve as a test to know the will of the electorates. One would wonder if there is any proper arrangement in India for such a venture. Electoral rolls are far from time many political workers whose services to the country in the electioneering campaigns will be of immense help are in prison. Bans and restrictions instituted under the Defence of India Rules are going strong in many provinces in spite of the fact that their purposes have been fully served. These are some of the disabilities the parties in general and the Congress in particular have to put up with. Against this there is the assurance of the Viceroy that the revision of electoral rolls will be taken up by the Government soon. The time at their disposal is short and the task they have to finish is gigantic. Would it be possible for the Government to bring it anywhere near a satisfactory level? We have to wait and see.

